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LAW AND OUTLAW

by
MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK.

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BY

Mrs. ALFRED SIDGWICK

AUTHOR OF

"SALT OF THE EARTH," "THE DEVIL'S CRADLE," ETC.

"Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Assiduously to keep alive."

—*A. Clough.*



NEW YORK

W. J. WATT & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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Printed in the United States of America

LAW AND OUTLAW

PROLOGUE

THE powdery snow had been falling for hours, and was gathering in drifts amongst the shrubs and on either side of the drive. A path to the house, wide enough for cars and carts, had been cleared that morning by Mr. Twistleton's gardeners, but as dusk came and all traffic stopped it was thinly covering again. Outside the house, in the suburban roads of Manchester, the snow lay in shoveled heaps as cold as the sky, and as grimy as the air; but within the gates of Green Bank it preserved its whiteness and, except where small birds left the mark of their claws, its smooth shining surface. The lighted house stood surrounded by a white world, warm within, freezing cold without. Daphne Twistleton shivered as she made her way to the front door. She carried a suit-case but no umbrella; and her hair, her hat, and her long fur coat were powdered with snow.

Yet she had hardly walked two hundred yards. The car that had brought her back to her husband's house waited in a sheltered corner of the road, just outside; waited, according to arrangement, in case anything went wrong. Not that anything was likely to go wrong. Daphne put down the suit-case, which was rather heavy for her, and tried to open the front door. It was locked. Of course. Jordan, the butler, had orders to lock it at tea-time, and in Mr. Twistleton's house servants obeyed orders. If they disobeyed they were dismissed. Daphne rang the bell and waited. The cold was intense. Her clothes, warm as they were, hardly protected her and she

shivered as she waited. She had not slept much since she left home two days ago, and the snow had given her violent neuralgia. Snow always did, unless she stayed indoors and took care. Her body longed for rest and warmth, but her thoughts were in such a turmoil that even the stinging pain in her head and eyes seemed of little moment! How slow Jordan was in opening the door! At last! She heard the inner door and then his fingers at the lock, but what was he about? Instead of throwing the door open he held it nearly shut, and peeped at her through the aperture.

"It's me, Jordan," she said.

"So I see, m'm," said he. "Sorry!"

How uncomfortable he looked! The hall light showed his face plainly, and though he tried to keep it inexpressive he was not succeeding well. He held something in one hand. A letter! He was shoving it through the door as if he wished her to take it. Her heart began to beat so violently that she could not speak for a moment. She took the letter and stood there staring at Jordan through the chink in the door.

"Why don't you let me in?" she said, before she looked at the letter. She could not read it without more light. She did not want to read it just then. She wanted to get inside the house.

"Sorry, m'm," said Jordan again. She wondered whether she could slip past him, and decided she could not. He was a big man and he stood as she had sometimes seen him stand when he was parleying with a troublesome tramp or hawker. These gentry came to the front door now and then, and by Mr. Twistleton's orders were sent promptly away, but they knew where to go to. They had their own shelters, Daphne supposed. She had not, nor had she any money with her.

"Go and tell Mr. Twistleton that I am here!" she cried next. "Be quick! I'm frozen."

The man hesitated.

"I can go and tell him, but I can't let you in, m'm," he said. "I have strict orders."

"Well, be quick," she said, with a little catch in her breath, "but mind you make Mr. Twistleton understand that I must see him."

The man shut the door in her face, and she waited close to it, listening. The pain in her eyes was acute, and she felt sick with it. Her feet were sodden with snow and numb with cold, for she had only taken thin shoes away with her. Luckily she felt wide awake, and when she heard the door again a quiver of hope set her pulses beating fiercely. The pain beat with them, but her will over-rode it, and when she saw her husband she faced him. He stood there silent and implacable.

"I've come back, Henry," she said.

"You can go away again."

"I have nowhere to go."

"That is your lookout . . . and your lover's."

"I have no lover."

He shut the door in her face. She beat on it loudly with her hands. Then he opened it again and she saw that his face was grim.

"If you make a disturbance I shall 'phone for the police," he said. "Go back to Coverdale. You left my house with him two days ago. I'll never receive you again."

"I left to go to the Gaytons' ball. I wanted to go to it so much."

"I had forbidden you to go."

"I should have been home yesterday, but the car broke down. They promised to mend it, but it took longer than they expected. We tried to get the last train and just missed it."

"I have nothing more to say. You will hear from my solicitors."

"Henry . . . I swear. . . ."

She saw that he did not believe her, and that he was on the point of shutting her out again.

"Henry, let me in!" she cried; "I must come in. I want Peggy."

"Peggy belongs to me."

"I am her mother."

"You deserted her."

"Only a day and a night . . . to go to a ball. Let me in, Henry. I've no money. What's to become of me?"

"I'll never let you in . . . never. I've done with you."

"Then give me Peggy."

"No."

It seemed to the woman that the man's whole body was convulsed with rage. His dull, horse-like features were as gray as his hair; and his eyes were fixed on her in anger and dislike. She had shifted her position slightly, and from where she stood now she could see beyond her husband into the inner hall. The very plants she had arranged two days ago were on the central table; the seats were as she had left them; the warm red carpet she had chosen covered the stairs. This had been her home for four years, and her child was in it.

"Can't you forgive me?" she said in a low voice, and found it difficult to say.

He slammed the door in her face, turned the key and took it out of the lock. She heard its grating sound as he did so, and heard him shut the inner door a moment later. She was alone in the dusk and the snow again: uncertain what to do next.

There was one thing she could do. Major Coverdale had said that he would wait where she had left him in his car, till she let him know that all was well. If she went back to him her way would be easy, easy and irrevocable. All day long he had urged her to take it;

urged her to go with him, since they loved each other, and she had held out for the child's sake; but also because the easy way, offering delight, does not come easy to a woman of Daphne's traditions. In misery and bodily pain she stumbled through the snow to the back of the house, thinking that she would make one more effort either to gain access or to get hold of her child. Here, too, the door was locked against her, but she knocked on it softly and had not long to wait. Mrs. Butterfield, her elderly cook-housekeeper, came to the door herself and looked at her young mistress with concern and sympathy, but she did not let Daphne in. She murmured something about the master's orders, and about the house being his, and not hers, unfortunately.

"I want to see Miss Peggy," said Daphne.

"She isn't here," said Mrs. Butterfield.

That was a fresh blow, and Daphne's spirit quailed under it. If her child was not in the house it was an empty husk and she had nothing to seek there, but how had it come about? Before she left home two days ago, she had kissed Peggy good-by in her nursery, and left her rosy, well, and smiling.

"Where is she?" she stammered.

"The master sent her away this morning with Nurse."

"Where to?"

"I don't know, m'm. None of us were told, and Nurse wouldn't say a word. Had her orders, too, I suppose."

Daphne turned slowly away.

"Where are you going to, m'm?" said the cook, her eyes following the drooping figure turning from the house.

"To the devil," said Daphne under her breath, and heard the door slam behind her. It was done suddenly as if in obedience to orders. Perhaps the master of the house had listened to their voices and interfered. Per-

haps Jordan, his mouthpiece, had appeared on the scene. It did not matter much. If Daphne could have seen Peggy, snatched her up, carried her off, her small, plump body clinging warmly to her, Peggy might have saved her, kept her in the straight path. . . .

"It's no use," she said to the man waiting for her. He had got out of the car when he saw her coming, and was standing beside her in the snow.

"What happened?"

"He won't have me in the house again."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes."

"Where's Peggy?"

"He has sent her away."

The man looked at the driving snow and at the threatening sky. Without saying anything more he put Daphne into the car and took the driver's seat himself. He wanted to find a shelter for the night, as quickly as possible. It would take twenty minutes' steady driving to get to the hotel he wished to reach, and the new snow was lying thick on the roads already. Before long all traffic for the night would be stopped by it. There was very little traffic now: so little that he could think as he drove. His thoughts, however, were not complicated. He knew what he wanted and he was going to get what he wanted: thanks to that skunk Henry Twistleton. How had Daphne ever come to marry him? But she had told him. A girl of eighteen . . . romantic, poor, generous. . . . A wealthy, elderly suitor . . . a persuasive mother . . . the story was as old as the hills, and as commonplace. Daphne had tried to do her duty too. He had good reason to know that. What he did not know, but guessed at, was Rhoda's share in the catastrophe, and what she meant to gain by it.

"Here we are!" he said, when they reached the hotel,

and he had opened the door of the car. He spoke in a cheerful, matter-of-fact way, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him to arrive at a well-known hotel with Daphne and stay there with her. She got out. He felt shocked when he saw the pallor of her face and the pain in her eyes: but he took her upstairs as quickly as he could, ordered a fire to be lighted at once, and while this was being done, went down to see about his car. When he got back the fire was burning and Daphne was alone in the room. She still sat in the chair to which he had led her, but she had slipped off her fur coat and was staring at a open letter in her hands. He sat down close beside her, took her hands in his and found that they were icy cold.

"You're frozen. . . . You're ill. . . . Your feet are wet through with standing about in the snow," he cried.

Without speaking and without meeting his eyes she gave him the letter she held and waited silently while he read it. She hid her head when he came to the end and with an angry exclamation crushed it and threw it on the fire. She made no effort to reclaim it. The few short sentences in which her husband accused her of infidelity and threatened her with divorce were burning in her brain. Word for word she could remember them.

"I'll take you to Italy," said the man beside her. "We'll wait there till you are free and then we'll marry."

"I can't think to-night," said the girl, pressing her hands to her eyes. "I'm crazy with pain. I'm frozen with cold. To-morrow. . . ."

"Very well," said the man slowly. "To-morrow!"

PART I

LAW

CHAPTER I

THE Twistletons had made their money in trade, and they had made a great deal. Henry Twistleton was the head of the firm, and the head of the family. For some time past he had thought of retiring from business and living at Beda Close, his house on Hallinwater: but he was a man of habit and found it hard to uproot himself. He had found it hard, four years ago, to give up his bachelor life and settle down as a married man; and he would probably never have done it if he had not wished for an heir to whom he could leave his worldly goods. He had brothers, but he was on frigid terms with them and their children. He thought of them as counting on his money; especially those who had not got on in life as he had, and he grudged them their natural succession.

At a house in Yorkshire where he had gone with his gun for the twelfth, he had met Daphne Mordaunt and her mother, and within a week, thanks to the mother, had arranged that the girl should marry him. The mother was a determined woman who had found life a battle, and had brought up her daughter to do as she was told. Here was a royal chance for a penniless girl, and she should shut her eyes and take it. Daphne did not seem unwilling. She was eighteen at the time, and Mr. Twistleton was fifty. She had never known what it was to possess a spare sixpence, and he offered her the

kingdoms of the world as far as they could be bought with money. She wanted above all things to go to Italy, and he said that if she married him he would take her there on their wedding journey. She thought more about Venice than about him, and was greatly tempted. She was as ignorant of life as a child, and used to take her mother's advice in all things. Mrs. Mordaunt, on tip-toe with anxiety, did not actually compel, but pointed out and cajoled. Poverty was hard and withering. A difference of years between husband and wife did not matter, when the years were with the man. "Let still the woman take an elder to herself." Daphne must please herself, of course, but if she wished her mother to die happy. . . .

It never occurred to Daphne even to think that it was more important for her to live happy than for her mother to die happy. In those days she had not learned to criticise her mother's arguments. As it turned out, Mrs. Mordaunt did die happy about a year later, soon after her grandchild Peggy had been born. She had not seen much of Daphne since her marriage, and from the girl's letters she judged that all was well. Daphne never complained. What could she have complained of? She had married with her eyes open, as the saying goes, and knew that her husband was elderly and dull. Perhaps she had expected him to be the affectionate slave of her youth and beauty; instead of which she found herself bound by his canons of conduct and domestic law. She was to look after his house, be the mother of his children, and show herself grateful for the material comforts she enjoyed at his expense. What could a woman want that he could not give her? She found the house ready furnished in a style she did not like, and was not allowed to alter; but she should not have been unreasonable enough to wish to do so. He did let her choose a new stair carpet when one was needed, and put up with

a red that was almost vermilion instead of the brownish shade that he considered practical. She would have worn these flaring colors if he had permitted it, but he quoted St. Paul to her and stopped them. She had to refuse dances and other pleasures because her husband would not go to such entertainments himself, and would not let her go without him; but what does a girl expect when she marries a man thirty-two years older than herself? He could not help being the husband of a young wife at home, but he had no intention of playing the part abroad. He made up his mind about that on their wedding journey. Daphne, it seemed, was attractive to young men. If permitted they would have swarmed round her like butterflies round a flowering buddleia. Mr. Twistleton was determined not to permit it, and put his foot down when he got back to Manchester. Daphne had been tractable at first. He had had no trouble with her till she met Coverdale.

It is well known to men of Mr. Twistleton's kind that army men have no morals. He would have kept him out of his house if he could. But Major Coverdale had come there with Rhoda Vyell, the young widow who lived close by and with whom Mr. Twistleton desired his wife to associate. The two women had never made friends. Daphne said she did not like Rhoda, but gave no reasons. Every man knows how mulish a woman can be in such cases. Of course Mr. Twistleton asked Rhoda to the house as often as he wished, and of course Daphne entertained her civilly. Unfortunately all through the autumn she brought Major Coverdale with her, and Mr. Twistleton had soon seen that the young man and his wife were in love with each other. He did not expect anything to come of it except heartache, a malady he only knew by hearsay and thought negligible. He read the papers every day and yet lived in the faith that men and women are not led from the paths of prudence by

passion. When Mrs. Vyell proposed that Daphne should go with her to the Gayton dance in Major Coverdale's car, he had forbidden his wife to accept the invitation. She had wept with vexation and disappointment, but she had not moved him. When he found that in spite of his prohibition she had gone, and gone without Mrs. Vyell, his wrath consumed him. He understood why men beat women who anger them.

"Couldn't you have prevented it?" he had said to Rhoda, and she had answered in such a way that he understood it to have been inevitable. She was very sorry to have failed them at the last moment, when they came to her door to fetch her; but she had had a bad headache and did not feel fit for such an expedition. She could assure Mr. Twistleton that her defection at that particular moment made no difference. If they had not gone away together that day, they would have gone another. For some time past Rhoda had seen that they were losing their heads.

"You really believe . . ." stuttered Mr. Twistleton.

The poor man could not bring himself to say plainly what he thought Rhoda really believed, but he saw that she took a serious view.

"I'll wait up for them," he said. "I'll let Daphne in myself, and when she sees how angry I am. . . ."

Mrs. Vyell had smiled and advised him to go to bed. He had not taken her advice. He had sat up all night and in the course of his bitter vigil he had thought of her smile many times. She knew more than she would say. How much did she know? Next day he would see her again and question her closely. She was a clever woman: clever and handsome, but difficult to understand. Not transparent like Daphne: but it was Daphne who had betrayed him. Of course, Rhoda was an older woman than his wife. About twenty-nine or thirty, he supposed. He wondered she had never married again.

Poor Vyell had died five years ago and left her badly provided for; but she made a little go a long way. She lived in that small house with her only child and two maids, and the house was well run on next to nothing. Mr. Twistleton knew, because he was poor Vyell's acting executor, and had seen a great deal of Rhoda after her husband's death. At one time it had even crossed his mind . . . but then he had gone to Yorkshire, met Daphne and come back an affianced man. He remembered breaking the news to Rhoda. It had been an uncomfortable thing to do. She had not liked it; he saw that; but she had taken it well. She was a quiet, self-contained woman, not lively and high-spirited like Daphne. She had strange, fixed eyes with heavy lids, wide nostrils, and a mouth that was usually tightly shut. Her wavy hair was quite black and grew low on her temples, and in the whites of her eyes there was a tinge of blue. She moved slowly and with grace, and she dressed well. Daphne had once said with a shudder that Rhoda had a cruel mouth; but Daphne's opinion did not count. She had been willing enough lately to frequent Rhoda's house and meet Major Coverdale there. Mr. Twistleton would have stopped this if he had known where it would lead; but at first Rhoda had reassured him. Now she blamed herself, now that it was too late.

For forty-eight hours Mr. Twistleton had waited and raged; gone to Rhoda for advice; suffered in his pride; made his plans. A telegram had come from Daphne saying that she had spent the night with the Gaytons, and would be back to dinner. Rhoda's incredulous smile as she read it confirmed his suspicions. When night came and still his wife did not return, Mr. Twistleton knew what he was going to do. In the morning he sent Peggy and her nurse to his sister at Alderly Edge.

"I think Daphne will come back," Rhoda had said. "She will come back to her child."

"She has forfeited all right to her child," said Mr. Twistleton savagely.

Rhoda had sighed, but agreed with him. All through his trouble she had showed herself discreet and sympathetic.

Mr. Twistleton could not have told you when the thought of marrying her first came into his mind again. On general principles he disapproved of divorce: said it put a premium on immorality. He did not wish to hear that Daphne had married Major Coverdale. On the contrary he would have wished her to do penance in a sheet and drag out the rest of her dishonored life pointed at and avoided like a plague. Again Rhoda agreed with him, but sighed. She was a fascinating woman, certainly: always the same; always at leisure to listen to a man and say just what pleased him. So different from Daphne, who had been smiles one moment and tears the next, with a quick temper of her own and bent on pleasure. Not that Daphne's temper had ever ruffled Mr. Twistleton. He had known how to deal with it. Still, a man marries in order to have the blessings and advantages of connubial life with the least possible trouble to himself. Daphne had not been a good house-keeper. She had left everything to the old servants she found in the house when she came to it as a bride, and had amused herself with flowers, books, and music. She played the piano well, but as Mr. Twistleton did not know one note from another, he had only listened to her when other people were present, and invited her to perform. She did not play cards, and never seemed able to learn, although at one time he had tried to teach her. In fact, she had been a failure from beginning to end. Peggy ought to have been a boy. So Mr. Twistleton mused and grumbled; while Rhoda Vyell knitted herself a jade green jersey and put in a word here and there that gradually led a dull, middle-aged gentleman to be-

lieve that life still held consolations. At the proper time he instituted proceedings for divorce, and as soon as it was legally possible he married Rhoda. He enjoyed his second honeymoon. Rhoda was a woman, not a child; old enough to be a companion, young enough to please. She spent a great deal of money and accepted everything he gave her as a matter of course. In fact, he often had an uncomfortable feeling that he was not giving her as much as she expected. The jewels that had been good enough for Daphne were not good enough for her. She took possession of them but wanted others more rare and valuable. Although she had bought herself a great many clothes when she married again, she bought a great many more with her husband's money when they were in Paris together. There seemed to be no limit to the personal luxury with which she liked to surround herself. When she got everything she wanted, she was even-tempered, but beneath her quiet manner something smoldered that Mr. Twistleton had not suspected and hardly understood yet. He saw a glimpse of it one day in the Bois, when a tiny child, badly dressed and dirty, came too close to her. Before she noticed it, a small grimy paw had clutched at a bit of gay embroidery on her frock, and left a little finger-mark on the delicate fabric of which the frock was made. She had risen to her feet in a fury, given the child a shove that left it sprawling on the ground, and walked on. The child was hurt and frightened by the fall and wailed loudly, but she never turned her head. Mr. Twistleton picked it up and restored it to an elder sister, who looked frightened herself and was not old enough to remonstrate.

"That child hurt its arm badly as it fell," he said when he rejoined her.

She made no answer, but after a silence that he felt was hostile began to talk of something else. When

they got back to their hotel they found letters and papers awaiting them, and when Mr. Twistleton opened his *Times* he saw the announcement of Daphne's marriage to Major Coverdale. This angered him deeply, and at great length he proceeded to expound his views with regard to unfaithful wives. They had not moved much since the time when such sinners were burned at the stake.

"Has Coverdale money?" he asked.

"Yes," said Rhoda. "He has a good deal."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Mr. Twistleton.

The second Mrs. Twistleton's half-closed her eyes and looked at her perturbed mate with derision.

"I don't think he has as much as you," she said, "but he has more than enough for Daphne. She never seemed to want anything but Peggy and her piano."

"She hasn't got Peggy," said Mr. Twistleton, and that idea seemed to give him satisfaction.

"No, we have Peggy," said Mrs. Twistleton.

CHAPTER II

PEGGY woke earlier than usual because it was her birthday: her ninth birthday. She did not expect anything exciting to happen; at least, nothing pleasant. But when you are nine you never know. You are too old to believe in fairies, but you are young enough to think that what happens to other children might equally well happen to you. Suppose you went downstairs to breakfast instead of having it in the school-room with Miss Busby and Mabel: and suppose your father and mother kissed you good-morning, wished you many happy returns and led you up to a surprise table full of presents. Everything you wanted most! A fishing-rod, a fox-terrier puppy (but he couldn't be on the table), Grimm's Fairy Tales, a big birthday cake! Iced! Pink and white, with letters on it. At tea-time it would have nine little lighted candles on it, and you, Peggy, would be allowed to cut it, and all the children who had come to tea with you would have some. After tea there would be games, and last of all little glasses of lemonade and cakes. . . .

There would be no children, there would be no cakes and probably no presents. All these joys had been showered on Celia Aysgarth last week and Mabel had been allowed to go to the birthday party. She had brought home the glittering account of it that fed Peggy's dreams, but Peggy had forfeited all right to be treated like a well-behaved child. She was bad: as bad as a child can be. Everyone said so; even Paterson, the head gardener who had been kind to her when she first came to Beda Close. He used to call her into one of the sheds and give her flowers or fruit sometimes, but

he never did so now. It was as much as his place was worth, he told her. Besides, one day not long ago when she had felt frozen with cold and dazed with crying she had gone into his peach house and hidden there: for she had known where to find the key. Unfortunately she came out of it in a fright and a hurry and left the door open. There had been a sharp frost that night and the tragic sequel of her carelessness was that the mansion, as the servants called the house, would have to send to Manchester for its peaches this summer or go without. Paterson did not understand what it meant to feel so frightened that you turned stupid and ran headlong, anywhere, so that it was far enough. Not that it ever answered. Someone officious is sure to find you and bring you back: and then you are punished. Besides, though you start running blindly, sooner or later you reflect that you have nowhere to go and that night is coming and that you are hungry and tired. Peggy was only nine, but she had discovered that escape without help was impossible. She did not even think of it as a rule. A child of her age accepts her fate and lives in the present. On the morning of her birthday, although she was not supposed to get up till she was called, she stole out of bed and looked through the window at the lake. The sun was shining on it, and the hills on the opposite shore were fast emerging from the broken and delicate veils of mist that had hidden them at dawn. The thrush that had a nest just beneath the window was flying to and fro with food for her young. By leaning still further over the sill Peggy might catch sight of their heads with their beaks all turned upwards for their meal. She had done so yesterday successfully. She would do so again to-day, very carefully and quietly, so that Miss Busby did not hear her. If she took a stick and pushed back the branches of the creeper from the nest she would be able to see still better. The baby thrushes would not

mind, and the mother thrush would be glad because it would be easier to get to the nest. Peggy came back from the window and looked round the room for a stick.

"Peggy!"

The child started and stared at the disheveled figure of the woman who had just come into the room. It was Miss Busby, the governess, who slept in the adjoining room with Mabel and was regarded with derision and a half-tolerant dislike by both her pupils. She had a foolish, fretful face and round pale eyes, and her voice was squeakily complaining.

"Peggy! you know you are not allowed to get up till I call you. I don't want to punish you on your birthday, but I ought to. Many happy returns and here is a little present for you. But what a troublesome child you are, with your bare feet on the floor when there might be pins or needles about. I know someone who had to have a needle cut out of her foot and the cut festered and hot poultices had to be applied. You would not like that, you know, and you have bedroom slippers."

Peggy had taken the wrapped-up parcel from Miss Busby's hands and was undoing the wrapper. She hardly heard what the governess said. It was so exciting to have a birthday and a present before breakfast. She did not like Miss Busby much: and especially not in the early morning when the governess was without her false teeth and her false plait, unwashed and uncombed. Her person offended Peggy's fastidious instincts, and so did her shabby old flannel dressing-gown, and her red quilted bedroom slippers torn at the toes. But it was very kind of her to have crocheted Peggy a cap and coat for her big doll Selina. Peggy did not play with dolls much now. She was getting rather old for them and they never had appealed to her as they had to Mabel. However, she still possessed Selina. The cap was black and the coat was black and yellow like a wasp.

"Thank you very much," said Peggy. "Now we can have a murder trial and Selina can be the judge. I found a dead mole yesterday and hid it in case I should want it. I don't suppose it will be very bad yet."

Miss Busby called her a horrid child and thrust her back into bed. There she had to lie till the housemaid came with hot water and early tea for the adjoining room. Even then she was not allowed to get up and dress herself. Mabel, who was eleven, did. Mabel went into the bathroom belonging to the schoolroom wing and had an agreeable warm bath that she adjusted for herself: but Peggy had to wait till Miss Busby had finished her early tea and was ready to give her the cold bath ordered for her. She never got used to it or liked it, but she had to endure it every morning. Miss Busby was not an agreeable bath attendant. She would not get up till the last moment and then she did everything in a hurry: plunging Peggy suddenly into the ice-cold water and scolding her if she wriggled. The soap went into her eyes, the shock took her breath away, the rough towel scrubbed her painfully. Even on her birthday, in April, Peggy's teeth chattered with cold as she tried to dress herself in the bedroom. Mabel came in before she had finished, wished her many happy returns, and presented her with a large spotted china cat. Mabel liked china cats, but she might have known that Peggy did not. What can you do with a china cat except put it on a shelf and see that it is hideous?

"Thank you," said Peggy politely.

"I don't believe you like it," said Mabel.

She was a pretty child in a dull way. She had dark curly hair, empty eyes, a straight nose and a small button mouth. She never seemed to have a hair of her head or a fold of her clothes in disarray, and she was as vain as a peacock. In choosing a present for Peggy she had not considered her step-sister's tastes for a moment.

She had bought the cat because it pleased her, and she was ready to feel aggrieved if it did not please Peggy.

"I do like it rather," said Peggy, still trying to be polite.

Then a most unfortunate thing happened. Her fingers were still numb with cold and were trying to hold the cat and fasten her frock at the same time; and the cat slipped from them and smashed in fragments on the bare floor. There was a small carpet in the room, but the cat fell just outside it. Mabel gave tongue in a wail that brought Miss Busby on the scene helter-skelter.

"What has she done to you?" she cried, addressing Mabel.

"Br-r-oken my cat—on purpose!" howled Mabel.

"Do you mean to say that she has broken the cat you bought her with your pocket-money for her birthday—just thrown it on the floor and smashed it to atoms?"

Mabel sobbed more loudly than before, and nodded her head. Peggy's eyes filled with tears too. It was dreadful the way things happened even on your birthday: and it was no use to say you were sorry, because you would not be believed. Besides, you were not very sorry. You did hate china cats, and Mabel knew it. This one had been spotted and the ugliest Peggy had ever seen; still, she would not have broken it on purpose. She would have kept it a little while, and then presented it to Mabel for her collection of china animals, which was large and various.

"What is all this noise?" said a low, level voice at the open door. And there stood Mother, in her embroidered scarlet dressing-gown that came from China, and had dragons on it. She was not Mother really, but you had to call her so, although you remembered your real mother quite well, and a frock she sometimes wore when she took you on her knee and called you her lady-bird and her pigeon. It was a blue frock with a bit of

fur near the neck that you called your pussy and liked to stroke.

"Come here!" said Mother, when she had heard Miss Busby's story, which was borne out by Mabel's tear-stained face; and you had to go, though you knew she would hurt you. But if you did not go she would hurt you more. She had Carlo with her this morning, the great black cat which followed her everywhere and arched his back at you if you tried to play with him. When he was not with Mother he was in the garden stalking birds. Sometimes he brought one in, and last week Peggy had found him in a dark corner of the hall mumbling over a baby rabbit that he had half killed and eaten. He was a wicked cat, and when Peggy saw him padding after the scarlet dressing-gown, she wondered whether he would go with Mother if ever she went up in the skies on a broomstick. Mother was not thin enough for a witch and she had not a nut-cracker nose and chin, but everyone knows that when a witch is clever she can disguise herself.

"Come here," she said again, and Peggy went, her heart in her shoes.

"Pick up those pieces and bring them to me," she ordered, and Peggy knelt down to do as she was told. While she was on her knees she heard Miss Busby and Mabel leave the room, and that frightened her. It was always worse when she was alone with Mother than when other people were present.

"You broke it on purpose."

The woman towered above the shrinking child, powerful and implacable.

"It slipped," said Peggy, her breath so affected by fright that she could hardly speak.

"Confess that you did it on purpose."

"But I didn't!" cried Peggy.

"You lie. No one believes what you say. You did

it to spite Mabel because you are jealous of her. You like to vex her and hurt her feelings."

"It slipped," reiterated Peggy, and instinctively put up her arm as if to ward off a blow. Mrs. Twistleton seized it, pulled the child to her feet and shook her violently over and over again. Peggy had a confused impression of her step-mother's hard, set mouth, with its cruel corners, as she did this, and of the look in her eyes. She felt bruised and dizzy when at last she was thrown back upon the floor, and thrown so roughly that she fell forward upon the broken china. It hurt horribly, and she could not keep back a scream of pain.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" said Miss Busby and Mabel a moment later. Mrs. Twistleton had taken no notice of Peggy's cry, but had moved slowly past the open schoolroom door, along the corridor to her own quarters. The heavy scent she used still clung to the air, when the governess and Mabel crossed her path in order to see what had happened to the family black sheep this time. As a rule after a scene with her step-mother she was discovered on the bed tearful, sore, raging and humiliated, but to-day she was not on the bed. She crouched on the floor dazed and pallid, while the blood streamed from a cut on her cheek. Mabel stared at her step-sister and then turned away.

"I wish I hadn't come in," she said plaintively. "The sight of blood always upsets me. Can't Peggy have breakfast in here, Miss Busby? I sha'n't be able to eat mine if I look at her."

"Go and eat yours now," said the governess. "By the time I have seen to Peggy you will have nearly finished. How did it happen, Peggy?"

Peggy waited until Mabel was out of the room, and then with a catch in her voice said, "She shook me as hard as she could and then threw me down. I feel sick and funny in my head, and look at my frock!"

"Dear, dear!" said Miss Busby. "I never saw such a child for bringing trouble on herself and others. The breakfast will be stone cold by the time we get it. Why did you break the cat?"

"It slipped," said Peggy wearily for the third time.

CHAPTER III

IT was just as bad after breakfast as it had been before. Father came into the schoolroom and said that as you had been disobedient and ungrateful you could not have the sovereign he had intended to give you; and lessons must be done as usual: and after lunch, which was your dinner, you would have to learn three verses of "Eugene Aram" and repeat them to Mother when you went down at five o'clock. You knew it was wrong to think of a present before you got it. Miss Busby always told you so, and when Father had gone she said it was a judgment on you. Perhaps it was: but if Mabel had given you something soft instead of a china cat you would not have broken it: and then you would have had your birthday sovereign as Mabel had hers a month ago: and you would have been able to buy a fox-terrier pup when they arrived at Dixon's cottage. Dixon had told you that he had ordered three or four and expected them any day and that you should have the pick of the bunch for a sovereign. Now you would have to tell him that you could not buy one. But you were not to go out this afternoon. That was the worst of all. Not to go out on a day like this when the birds were singing, and it was warm enough to be on the lake, and all the trees were bursting into leaf. Even if you could have stayed at home and read the "Arabian Nights" you might have enjoyed yourself, and looked forward to going out to-morrow; but the "Arabian Nights" belonged to Mabel and she would not lend it to you, although she never read it herself. She said she did not want it dog's-

eared and pointed to your poetry book. But that had not been new when you had it. Besides, you generally had to learn verses when you had been naughty, and some of your naughtiness did at times vent itself on a book associated with punishment. You liked a great many of the poems in it, but you never liked those set for you to learn. Some were dull and some were horrible. You did not care much for "Lucy Gray" and you hated "King Crocodile." Celia Aysgarth had an enchanting book about a crocodile pulling a baby elephant by its nose, but that did not frighten you as the poem did. Besides, however well you learned your verses, you would stammer and stumble when you tried to say them to Mother. When her eyes fixed themselves on you something went dead and silly in your brain, so that you forgot what you had known as well while you came downstairs. Afterwards you would remember it perfectly, but that was not much use, especially when the poem you had been made to learn was one that you wished you could forget. You had always hurried past "The Dream of Eugene Aram," but now you knew most of it by heart, and could not get it out of your mind:

Of lonely folk cut off unseen
And hid in sudden graves:
Of horrid stabs in groves forlorn
And murders done in caves.

As long as it was light you could forget it, and so you could while other people were with you. It was when you were shut up in an attic or a garden shed . . . locked in so that no one could let you out except Mother, who would not come even if you screamed. Miss Busby knew the most dreadful murder stories and liked telling them, but she never told them to Mabel. Sometimes you wished she would not tell them to you, but it was

rather difficult not to listen when she was in one of her kind moods and let you look at her picture paper.

And unknown facts of guilty acts
Are seen in dreams from God!

That had come into the verses you had learned last week, and you had been obliged to say them over ten times because they were about you as well as about Eugene Aram. It meant that the eye of God saw your wickedness and would punish it. You might hide things on earth if you were clever and deceitful, but you could not hide anything from Heaven. You hardly knew yourself whether you were glad or sorry when the china cat was broken. But Heaven knew and judged you accordingly. At least Miss Busby said so, and she was very religious. She said everything was known beforehand and that it was written in the book of Fate whether you would grow up so wicked that some day you would commit a murder as Eugene Aram did, and be hanged. A horrible verse would have to be learned and repeated to-day. Not that it needed learning. You knew every word, although you always tried not to look at it:

Two sudden blows with a ragged stick,
And one with a heavy stone,
One hurried gash with a hasty knife,
And then the deed was done:
There was nothing lying at my feet
But lifeless flesh and bone.

It was true. It was real. Many years ago it had happened to a poor old man. Miss Busby had found an account of it in one of the old books in the library downstairs, and had read it aloud. She said you were to remember that Eugene Aram had not always been a murderer, but only a young man with evil proclivities,

and that if you were born with evil proclivities you should be grateful to the elders who corrected them.

With a start Peggy came out of these speculative troubles into the actual one of a lesson on the geography of Italy, to which she had not been attending properly. She was never allowed to sit opposite the window, because she looked out when she should not have done, but even on the schoolroom wall the sunlight was dancing to-day and making patterns. She watched it while Miss Busby fussed and scolded and said that if she did not point to Florence, Rome, and Naples instantly she should go without her milk and biscuits at eleven. Then she looked at her open atlas and saw an indistinguishable network of names on a dark background. Mabel had one with a sensible light background, but Peggy knew that she would not be allowed to use it. She would only be told that she had an envious disposition, and probably get rapped over the knuckles by Miss Busby's ruler. Miss Busby was not cruel. She did not exactly enjoy hurting you. There was only one person in the world as bad as that, but Miss Busby had an irritable temper, especially when she had not slept well and felt her neuralgia coming on. Once she had been engaged to a curate and the curate had jilted her for a creature with golden hair and money. Miss Busby always spoke of her rival as a creature, and she told Peggy that for a single moment she had known what it felt like to wish to put an enemy out of the way. But she had conquered her evil passions as Peggy must learn to do. Peggy's head ached this morning and she wanted her milk and biscuits badly. She could not find any of the names demanded of her, partly because Miss Busby hammered on the table impatiently and drank her own glass of milk with a gurgling sound that was unpleasant.

Peggy was a thin, nervous-looking child with greenish eyes that were both scared and dare-devil, and with a

mop of short, copper-colored hair. Her little life had been a sea of troubles for years, either because her step-mother was wicked, or because she was wicked herself. She never felt quite sure which. In the stories she knew about cruel step-mothers the child was always blameless and holy. She was never a tomboy that tumbles out of one scrape into another. Peggy would have been blameless and holy if she could. But things were so difficult. This morning, for instance, she ought to have attended to her geography lesson instead of allowing her fancy to engage itself with painted terrors. Mabel was different. She was afraid of everything she could touch and of nothing she could only think about. But Mabel was stupid: and as for being fond of her, you might as well be fond of that wooden idol in the toy cupboard that had come long ago from the South Seas. Mabel was pretty and the idol was hideous, but they were both wooden and had dollish eyes. Mabel was greedy too. She had eaten a large breakfast this morning and Peggy had eaten hardly anything; and yet she had just stretched out her hand towards Peggy's biscuits after having finished her own. It was more than Peggy could bear. Beneath Miss Busby's very eyes she snatched up the remaining biscuit and crammed it into her mouth before the affronted governess could stop her. The map of Italy was forgotten in this new instance of rank rebellion that had to be dealt with summarily. The rest of the morning passed like a nightmare with Peggy in the corner and Miss Busby groaning over her neuralgia and the miseries of her lot. When the gong went for lunch she forgot to make Peggy wash her face and hands, and Peggy forgot that the gash on her face needed attention. She ran downstairs ahead of Miss Busby without realizing that her cut cheek, tear-stained eyes, and her dirty pinafore were unpresentable. It was dreadful, because there were guests to lunch: people who stared and

smiled: while Father looked like thunder and Mother came slowly towards the door and whispered angrily to Miss Busby, who was just behind. Peggy heard enough to know that she had done something awful again, and that Miss Busby was trying to excuse herself. Then Mother went back to her guests, and Peggy was pushed out of the room.

"You are not to go in to lunch," said Miss Busby, when she got outside the door. "You are to go back to the schoolroom."

"But I'm dreadfully hungry," said Peggy.

"I can't help that," said Miss Busby, and went back into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Butterfield, the cook-housekeeper, sat down to rest a moment. She was a mountain of a woman advanced in years, and not as active as she had been. She had lived with Mr. Twistleton's mother and then with him before and after his first marriage, and she well remembered the night of snow when Peggy's mother was turned away. Right was right, and Peggy's mother had soon married Major Coverdale, so there must have been something in it. Still, Mrs. Butterfield did not approve of the second Mrs. Twistleton, although as a mistress she was usually bearable. Not always. Her temper got the better of her sometimes and then she would carry on more like a fish-wife than a lady. All the maids knew that, and Mr. Jordan himself came downstairs put out occasionally. But luckily in these days servants who know their work can take care of themselves. Mrs. Twistleton was clever enough to know that, and never went too far below stairs. Up above it was a different matter.

"Mrs. Butterfield!"

The stout woman jumped and put her hand to her heart. She had been nearly asleep, that she had, and

what was Miss Peggy doing here in the hall when she ought to have been sitting upstairs at lunch; and what for goodness' sake had she done to her face to cut it like that; and why had she been crying; and just look at her pinafore!

"I fell," said Peggy, staring at a large wart near Mrs. Butterfield's nose that always fascinated her. It looked as if a determined tweak would remove it any day.

"You fell. . . ."

Peggy nodded and did not speak. She was ashamed to be a cry-baby at her age, but the tears welled into her eyes again, and rolled down her cheeks.

"I'm hungry," she said with a sob.

Mrs. Butterfield asked no further questions. She could put two and two together when the sum was presented every day in slightly different guises. Miss Peggy had been in disgrace again: had been in mischief, presumably.

"You know you are not allowed to come down here begging for things to eat," she said severely.

Peggy turned red and went back towards the door.

"Now then . . . don't be off like a lamplighter," said Mrs. Butterfield, whose analogies were often obscure and whose diction was a stumbling-block to the genteel amongst her colleagues.

"I'm not a beggar," said Peggy. "I don't care. I'll wait till tea-time."

"Proud as a peacock. That's why you fell, I'll be bound. Now wait a bit, my pet, and we'll see what we can do. Why, here's Mr. Jordan with the chicken."

So there was: and before Peggy could pass him Mrs. Butterfield had put a large comforting arm round her.

"The poor mite's got nowt inside her little wame," she said to the butler. "I'm going to give her some meat."

"It's at your own risk if you do," said Jordan. "We have our orders and you know what children are. They tell tales."

"I don't tell tales," cried Peggy indignantly.

"It's a shame, it is," continued Mrs. Butterfield. "Look at her face!"

"It's my birthday," said Peggy.

"Who did that to your face?" asked Jordan.

"I broke a china cat and then I fell and a big piece stuck up and cut me."

"Did you fall by yourself or did someone push you?" asked Mrs. Butterfield, and nodded shrewdly at Jordan when Peggy turned scarlet and did not answer.

"I thought as much," she said, and hobbling away on two feet that seemed inadequate supports for so much solid flesh, she fetched the child some chicken and vegetables and set her down at the table to eat it.

"Don't choke yourself, but be as quick as you can," she counseled; "and remember it's between you and me and the post."

Peggy ate ravenously.

"The child's nothing but skin and bone," grumbled Mrs. Butterfield. "Look at her! I'd be ashamed, I would, if she was mine. But when the master is as blind as Cupid and the missus sits at her window and tires her head . . . you take my meaning?"

"I do," said Jordan, "but what I say to myself, not to you, Mrs. Butterfield, is, Mind your own business."

"That's right enough as far as it goes," said the cook, "but there's a limit to everything."

"Besides," said Jordan, "the child's mother was a slip of a girl. That sort is born thin and dies thin."

CHAPTER IV

DID you know my mother?" said Peggy, staring. "Haven't we lived in the family this twenty years?" said Mrs. Butterfield, in the vexed evasive voice of one who knows that has been said which it had been wiser not to say. "What'll you have now? Some raspberry cream, I think, as it's your birthday, and we're making a day of it. As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb if you must be hung at all. Here it comes, like the pigeon that flew into Willie Wood's mouth when he was star-gazing."

Mrs. Butterfield had gone outside and returned with a plate on which there was a large helping of a delicious pink cream that Peggy knew but had not often been allowed to have. Flavored with raspberries it was, and full of little banana chunks that tasted of raspberry as well as of banana. The Princess always had it for her wedding-breakfast when she married the Prince. Peggy had been so sharpset that she had gobbled up her chicken in no time, but she began upon the cream slowly so as to make it last.

"Henry the Eighth had six wives," she began after a ruminating pause.

"Solomon had hundreds and hundreds," said Mrs. Butterfield. "Women must have been plentiful in those days."

"They are now," said Jordan; "in heathen countries a man can have as many wives as he wants."

"Solomon was no heathen," said Mrs. Butterfield. "It never struck me before, but as a matter of fact he must

have been a Jew, like that Mr. Cohen I was with before I went to Mrs. Twistleton. Solomon was no heathen."

"Nor was Henry the Eighth," said Peggy; "he was a religious man, but changeable. I wish. . . ."

"What you wish, ducky? . . . Some sponge-cake with your cream . . . seeing as it's your birthday. . . ."

"A man can't behead his wife, nowadays, even if he is king," continued Peggy, accepting the sponge-cake.

"At least, Miss Busby says so."

"Miss Busby is right," said Mrs. Butterfield. "A pretty state of things it would be."

"The Turks sew 'em up in a sack," contributed Jordan, and Peggy's eyes fixed themselves on him with interest. "They sew 'em up in a sack and throw 'em in the Bosphorus."

"Alive?"

"Alive or dead: what's it matter? I'd as soon be drowned as strangled. Wouldn't you?"

"I expect Hallinwater is as deep as the Bosphorus," said Peggy. "It's very deep if you row out a little way. I wish Father was a Turk."

"Bless us and save us, what next?" cried Mrs. Butterfield, scandalized. "A Turk's no better than a heathen. He can have a dozen wives if wives are his fancy."

"Well, Father has two," said Peggy.

"Never. It's not allowed in Christian countries."

"You mean they don't have two in the same house. I wish they did. I wish my own mother was in this house. Where is she, Mrs. Butterfield?"

"Not knowing, can't say."

"Is she alive?"

"That's enough, Miss Peggy. You well know that we are forbidden to mention your mother's name. Ask no questions and you'll get no stories told. You run along back to the schoolroom this minute or there'll be trouble. When Mr. Jordan takes in the coffee, as he is

commencing to do, Miss Busby goes upstairs. She is probably on the way now."

"Did you ever hear of Eugene Aram, Mrs. Butterfield?"

"Can't say as I have. Does he visit here?"

"He's dead: He murdered an old man."

"What did he want to do that for?"

"For gold.

"Two sudden blows with a ragged stick,
And one with a heavy stone,
One hurried gash with a hasty knife. . . ."

"Now I won't have it, Miss Peggy, and that's flat," cried the cook. "Teaching a child like you such horrors! Miss Busby ought to be ashamed of herself, and she may know as I said so. 'What does little birdie say in her nest at break of day?' That's pretty. Or, 'The boy was on the burning deck,' if you want something exciting. I wonder you don't have a nightmare."

"I have to learn it as a punishment," explained Peggy. "I hate it. Sometimes people murder children. They get them away into lonely places and murder them. There was one only the other day . . . in a wood. . . ."

"Now who tells you any such tales?" exclaimed the cook, taking the child upon her knee, for Peggy had sidled closer and closer to her with wide-open eyes and her voice choked with terror.

"Mother told me about that one," said Peggy, "but she said I mustn't tell Mabel, or I would be whipped, so I haven't, but I can't help thinking about it, because Mother said probably the boy had been a nuisance and was better out of the world than in it. And she did kill the kitten when it scratched her. Miss Busby saw her fling it into the water-butt. It made her heart have palpitations. But she has never said anything about it except to me. You won't tell, will you?"

"What on earth is the child chattering about?" said

Mrs. Butterfield, holding Peggy closely to her in a kind, comfortable way. "‘Ding dong bell,’ I know, and the pussy in the well. ‘Who pulled her out? Little Tommy Trout.’ But I never heard of any kitten being drowned, as ought not to have been so treated. The young ones have to be made away with or we’d all get eaten out of house and home by cats, but they know nothing about it."

"This was quite a big kitten," said Peggy. "It belonged to Ada Dixon. It was in the kitchen garden and so was Mother. She picked it up and it scratched her, so she flung it into the water-butt and let it drown. She thought no one saw her, but Miss Busby was just behind the shed and did see."

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Butterfield. "So that's what happened to Ada's kitten. And Dixon always blaming one of the garden boys. In fact, he and Mr. Paterson had words over it, and have hardly spoken since. I never!"

"You won't tell, will you?"

"Not me. I've no wish to come to a bad end as all tell-tales do. Now run along, Miss Peggy, and get ready for your walk."

"I'm not to go for a walk. I've got to stay at home and learn those horrid verses."

"Well, they won't take you long. You seem to know them already. You've plenty of story-books, haven't you? Quick! Up the back stairs. They're coming out of the dining-room."

Peggy fled, and Mrs. Butterfield sat still in her easy-chair until Jordan came in again.

"The more I think of Solomon, the less I like him," said she to the surprised butler. "Wasn't it him who said 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'? I presume he had some caterwauling upstairs, with all those wives about, but who asked him to marry them?"

"I don't hold with criticising biblical personages," said Jordan stiffly. "If we once began no one knows where we should end. Things were different in those days."

"He should have thought before he spoke," persisted the cook, and then waddled upstairs to have her afternoon nap. On her way she passed the schoolroom door and listened there; but she could not hear a sound, so she hoped that Peggy had been forgiven and taken out for a walk.

But Peggy was not out. She was curled up in a corner of the old horsehair sofa with her poetry book open on her lap, and she was saying the four verses she had to learn over and over again, shuddering at every horrid line: afraid to remember, and still more afraid to forget. She shut her eyes and saw the universal air lit with a ghastly flame. That would be a blue flame, like snapdragon at Christmas, she supposed. She was not afraid of snapdragon and had pulled out figs and dates until Mother called her greedy and pushed her back. Mabel had not put her hand in once, and Miss Busby had only done so gingerly. But snapdragon flames only filled a bowl and soon burned out. This flame filled the universal air and in it there were ten thousand dreadful eyes: and from the lifeless clay the blood gushed out when she touched it. . . . No, not she . . . Eugene Aram . . . but some day if she committed a murder . . . or if someone found her tied to a tree and murdered her . . . some horrid tramp . . . no one would hear her scream . . . the tarn was a long way from the house, "A sluggish water black as ink, the depth was so extreme." Yet she loved the tarn better than any place in the world . . . loved its silence and its mystery. She had not told anyone, not even Mrs. Butterfield, what happened there the other day: because if she had not been naughty and silly perhaps it would not have happened. Besides, you never knew. If you told when you were

strictly forbidden to you might be found out, and then . . . Peggy had never been afraid of the tarn till Mother saw her there one afternoon, when she ought to have been with Miss Busby, and tied her to a tree with a long scarf as a punishment for running away. Of course she ought not to have run away, but Miss Busby had been cross and Mabel tiresome. There was never anyone cross and tiresome at the tarn.

It had got quite dark and cold before she was released, and she had been tired with standing on her feet all that time. At first she had thought she would not mind. All the lovely trees, and plants that grew round the tarn, the birds in the air, the fish flopping in and out of the water, and the wild duck that had a nest on the little island, and the wicked but beautiful heron that came to eat the fish . . . all these were her friends, and would not hurt her; but it had been terrifying at the tarn when the dark came. It was as if all your friends vanished and your enemies came, especially thoughts. There was the thought about the boy who had been decoyed into a wood and murdered: and there was Mother's story of the owl that had flown at someone and torn his cheek.

Peggy most particularly loved owls, the wise, soft birds that flew by night and called to each other as you went to sleep. She would have liked one for a pet: but she was not allowed to have live pets. She wanted a fox-terrier more than anything in the world, but Mother said that Carlo might not like it, and that the fox-terrier might not like Carlo.

Peggy knew her verses word for word now, but knew with harrowing certainty that when she tried to repeat them to her step-mother she would stumble and forget. However, it was no use to waste more time on them, and she went to the toy cupboard in search of amusement. Her eyes fell on the Polynesian idol lolling in a corner, battered and limbless. She had an idea, and

when Peggy had an idea she acted on it without regard to consequences. But the thing wanted a wig. Well, you can make a wig of wool, and there was always wool on the top shelf where Miss Busby kept her everlasting crochet. Peggy got a chair, found a skein of black wool, and cut it into short lengths. It made a thick wig: not quite crinkled enough . . . but one can't have everything. There must be a frock too . . . a trailing one . . . Mabel's new dressing-gown, made out of Mother's old one. Peggy remembered Mother in it well. The very flowers on it were associated with those painful and humiliating moments when you discover how badly an elegant shoe can hurt if vigorously applied. She fetched it from Mabel's room, and draped it round the idol, which she propped up in Miss Busby's easy-chair. Then she stood in front of it with her back towards the door.

"Do you know your verses?" she asked, speaking for the idol in a harsh voice.

"Yes, Mother," she squeaked in a falsetto meant to counterfeit her own voice.

"Say them."

"Two sudden blows with a ragged stick,
And one with a heavy stone,
One hurried gash. . . ."

Peggy had yet another idea. She picked up the long ruler from the schoolroom table and took up her position in front of the idol again. "Now then," she said threateningly.

"Begin again," said the idol.

"I'm going to," said Peggy. "I'm going to say them till you wish you'd never heard them, I am. I think I'll begin at the beginning. No, I won't. I'll say to-day's verses over and over again till I can't forget them even when you stare at me. You're only Mumbo-Jumbo, but you'll do."

It was a fascinating game, satisfying both to body and soul: at least it satisfied that angry corner of the soul where Mother, but no one else, had her being. You would have played a different game if you had wanted Mumbo-Jumbo to be Mrs. Butterfield or Celia Aysgarth, or even Mabel.

"What is all this?" said Father's voice just behind her. He had come into the room with a strange man.

CHAPTER V

PEGGY had not confined herself to recitation. She had acted her dialogue and then danced in front of her wooden image, hitting at it with the ruler. Her own mop of hair was disheveled, her black-stockinged legs were as thin as drum-sticks, her face, when she turned in terror at her father's voice, was colorless and tear-stained. The gash made on it that morning still needed attention. So did her hands.

"What a little ragamuffin!" thought Victor Gerard, who was unmarried and knew nothing of children. "Why don't they wash her and keep her tidy?"

"This is the little girl," said Mr. Twistleton. "Come here, Peggy, and shake hands with Mr. Gerard. Don't stand there staring like that. Why are you not at work? I understood that you were kept in because you had been naughty and had a lesson to learn."

"I've learnt it," said Peggy, answering her father but fixing her eyes on his companion, whom she had heard of but had never seen before. She saw that he was much younger than her father and that he had a twinkle in his eye and about his mouth. Just now his face was grave, but you could see the twinkle all the same. It was there a little when he looked at you and a little more when he looked at Mumbo-Jumbo in her black wig and flowered gown. He did not wait for you to walk right across the room to him, but came forward, and took hold of the hand you held out. He had a firm comfortable hand. You liked the feel of it, and the sound of his voice.

"Were you rehearsing a part in a play?" he asked. "Are you going to act in one? It looked rather like

Punch and Judy, with you as Punch. Did you ever see Punch and Judy?"

"What were you doing?" said Father harshly.

"I was saying my verses," you answered, and your voice sounded nearly as silly and frightened as when you were making believe. Father was not in the least like Mother. He did not hurt you on purpose. But he was always a long way off, and he never understood. Besides, he believed whatever Mother said to him.

"What verses?" he asked. "Some that have been set as a punishment, I suppose?"

You hung your head and felt so shy and miserable that you did not speak.

"Answer when you are spoken to," said Father.

You began to cry. You are sure you would not have done so if you had not cried before that day. But everyone knows what it is. Begin a day badly and it goes on badly. Tears in the morning, and ten to one there will be tears in the afternoon. They seem to stay close behind your eyes and come there even when you are trying hard to keep them back.

"You see how it is," said Mr. Twistleton. "Sulky and troublesome, I am sorry to say. My wife is the only person who can manage her. You must think over it before you accept, Victor. If you would rather not do it I must try to find someone else. But of course I should be very glad . . . and it may not come on you for years. . . . What the . . . what is all this?"

Mr. Twistleton's short-sighted eyes had only just discovered the dressed-up figure in the chair: and he was now examining it through his glasses with gathering amazement and indignation.

"My wife's dressing-gown . . . a black wig. . . ."

He turned suddenly on Peggy in a fury and shook her there and then before Mr. Gerard, whom she had never seen before.

"I saw you raining blows on it," he muttered. "You abandoned child! Everything I am told about you is true. What will become of you? I've a good mind to send you straight out of the house. You are not fit to be in it."

"But wasn't it Punch and Judy?" said Mr. Gerard, and he contrived as he spoke to get between Mr. Twistleton and the child.

"It was nothing of the kind. You don't understand the enormity of the offense. You don't realize that she has dressed up an image of my wife and was in the act of delivering a murderous attack on it when we entered the room. A child that can conceive such an idea and carry it out is capable of anything."

Stated so, Peggy's conduct did sound bad, and Victor Gerard looked at her inquiringly. He knew that he did not understand children and he was sure that he disliked them. This child had fine eyes and hair, but it looked as frightened as a rabbit. Besides, it cried. Mr. Twistleton had just asked him to be co-executor, with his wife, of his will, and co-guardian of this child: and Victor had accepted the post. As far as he knew, Mr. Twistleton's life was still a good one. Probably the child would be of age before her father died. If not, the office of guardian would be more a matter of business than of any personal relation. Peggy would naturally live with her step-mother for years to come. So the situation had presented itself downstairs in the tranquil and decorous atmosphere of Mr. Twistleton's study. Up here, it suddenly seemed changed. There might be breakers ahead. Still, Victor would not have to navigate them unless Mr. Twistleton died unexpectedly: and he had more or less given his word. Besides, he was not going to back out because a child of nine was troublesome. He would like to know a little more about her.

"I'm afraid I must go," said Mr. Twistleton; "I want

to get that letter off to Barnes & Norton by to-day's post. Are you coming, Victor?"

"In one moment, sir," said the younger man, and stopped behind. When the door shut he took Peggy on his knee.

"Stop crying!" he said, and Peggy stopped and stared. She liked sitting on Victor's knee. She liked the feel of his arm round her and the tone of his voice, even when it came short and sharp as it did just now. You obeyed it, but you did not obey with hate inside you: and if you were afraid it was the kind of fear that makes you want to please the person inspiring it.

"What were you doing when we came in?" said Victor, as soon as he thought the child could speak.

"I was saying my verses."

"What verses?"

"I have four to learn because I broke the china cat, and I shall have to say them to Mother this afternoon, and I always forget, however well I know them, and then. . . ."

"No crying," said Victor in a hard voice, that somehow helped you not to cry: for though his voice was hard his arm round you was kind.

"I thought I'd pretend Mumbo-Jumbo was Mother and say them over to her and then perhaps I shouldn't forget."

"So you dressed up Mumbo-Jumbo in that gown and that wig to make believe?"

"Ye-es."

"But why were you beating it?"

"She beats me."

Victor's inclination was to sheer away as quickly as possible from a confidence he did not wish to receive and which laid a charge he could not examine. Children were naughty the world over. He had lately smacked one of his little nephews himself, and his sister had only

half liked it. But he meant to do it again if necessary. Spoilt children were a torment to themselves and everyone else.

"I expect you deserve it," he said, speaking lightly.

"I expect I do," sighed Peggy; "but it hurts."

"How old are you?"

"Nine. To-day's my birthday."

"Your birthday! You seem to be having a merry time. Where are your presents?"

Peggy snuggled close to the young man's tweed coat and told him the story of the china cat and the misfortunes ensuing.

"I did not break it on purpose," she assured him, and by this time her arm was round his neck and her cheek on his shoulder.

"So you've had no presents!" he said sadly, but there was still the twinkle in his eye.

"I've had one," explained Peggy, and she got off his knee for a moment to show him the big doll wearing the black tam-o'-shanter that Miss Busby had made for it.

"Are you fond of dolls? Do you want another?" asked Victor.

Peggy shook her head and climbed on his knee again.

"I feel too old for them," she said. "Mabel doesn't, but I do. I never did care much for dolls. Don't you think they are rather silly?"

"What do you want most for your birthday?"

"The fox-terrier."

"What fox-terrier?"

"The one that Dixon would have sold me if I had had my birthday sovereign. He promised me the pick of the litter."

"When will they come?"

"I don't know. Not yet, Dixon says."

"Would you be allowed to have one?"

"I don't know."

"Shall I ask? Shall I send you one that has been trained and is old enough to run about with you? I say . . . steady now . . . you mustn't crumple my collar. Will chocolates do if dogs are not admitted?"

Peggy nodded her head blissfully. "But I'd rather have a dog," she said. "He would be my very own, wouldn't he? I shouldn't have to share him with Mabel."

"Your very own from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail. What will you call him if he comes?"

"What are you called?"

"Victor."

"But I won't call him that," mused Peggy. "It might be rather confusing when you come to see us: and it wouldn't sound polite. I think I'll call him Dingo after yellow dog Dingo in the story."

"But he won't be yellow if he is a fox-terrier."

"I can pretend he is yellow," argued Peggy, so Victor left it at that.

"Where do you live?" she asked him.

"In Manchester at present."

"I lived there once."

"I know."

"I remember it. I remember my own Mother a little."

"Do you?"

"Yes. I wish she would come back: but Mrs. Butterfield says this is a Christian country and that a man can't have two wives. It's a pity."

"Who is Mrs. Butterfield?"

"She is our cook-housekeeper. I'm very fond of her. She gave me some chicken and raspberry cream to-day because I was hungry: but don't tell anyone. It was as much as her place was worth to do it. She said so."

"Why weren't you at lunch? I saw you come in and then disappear."

"Mother sent me upstairs. She said I was a disgraceful object and that Miss Busby ought not to have

taken me down. Miss Busby cried about it just before she went out and said she had never been spoken to so in her life, and that it was all my fault for running downstairs without washing my face and hands. I expect I had better wash them before she comes back or she will be upset again."

"I expect you had," said Victor. "They want it: and I'm off now. I have a train to catch."

"When will you come again?"

"I've no idea. Some day, if you're good."

It was distressing to see him go and hear the door shut behind him. Peggy wished she could have gone with him. She turned drearily to Mumbo-Jumbo and divested it of the wig and the dressing-gown. The wig she burned. The dressing-gown she put back in Mabel's room. Then she washed her face and hands: but the cut on her face hurt her, and still looked red and angry. She wished now that Victor had not seen her so grubby and disfigured. She wondered he had wanted her to sit on his knee and put her arm round his neck. The school-room seemed emptier than usual when she went back to it. Her birthday would soon be over now, but before it was over she would have to go downstairs.

"For every clot a burning spot
Was scorching in my brain."

"What are you droning to yourself?" said Miss Busby's high complaining voice. "Do you mean to say that you've not learned those verses yet? Mabel and I have been out nearly two hours, and you've had nothing else to do."

"I have," said Peggy. "I've had visitors."

"Visitors! What do you mean?"

"Father brought Mr. Gerard up here."

"Whatever for?" said Mabel.

"Father went away, but Mr. Gerard stayed a long time."

"I like Mr. Gerard," said Mabel. "I sat next to him at lunch. I wish I hadn't gone out."

"I sat on his knee," said Peggy triumphantly. "He's very clean. His neck smelt of soap."

"I hope you were clean yourself," said Miss Busby.

"I wasn't," said Peggy, "but he didn't seem to mind. He let me put my head on his shoulder. I made a little finger-mark on his collar at the back, but I don't think anyone would notice it. He is going to give me a fox-terrier, if they will let me have one."

CHAPTER VI

THE fox-terrier had arrived and was everything that a fox-terrier ought to be—in Peggy's opinion. He had a pointed nose and a black patch over one eye. He had several other black patches, one just over his tail. He was like the fox-terrier in "The Dog's Day," a treasure of a book that Celia Aysgarth possessed and Peggy coveted. She meant to buy it if ever she had any pocket-money, but she never did have any. There were no shops nearer than Senwick, and she never went to Senwick, so she did not miss money much as a rule. Dingo knew that he belonged to Peggy and when she was dressing to go out he jumped all over her and barked with excitement. He had a lovely bark. It seemed to talk to Peggy and say pleasant, friendly things such as she said to him. He was a very young dog with a great deal to learn in the world, and out of doors he tried to catch birds. He did catch flies and once he caught a trout in a beck. No one would believe this, but Peggy had seen it in his mouth and shouted at him because she felt sorry for the trout. When she was at lessons he snuggled at her feet as good as gold, and sometimes blinked at her with his little varminty eyes. Every day Peggy brushed and combed him, for he was a wire-haired fox-terrier and looked lovely when he had just been brushed. She was not allowed to wash him because Miss Busby said she would make such a mess if she tried. Dixon did that outside, and carried him to the back door in his arms so that he could not roll and get dirty again before Peggy saw him. Dixon was

a kind man and fancied dogs himself, and he did not mind Peggy having Dingo instead of one of the puppies that had not arrived yet: especially after she told him of her disappointment about the birthday sovereign. Peggy was not supposed to let Dingo sleep in her room at night: nor was she allowed to have him when she had been naughty. That embargo made life more difficult than ever, because when she offended Dingo suffered with her. When she was in disgrace he was shut up in a dark housemaid's cupboard where Peggy could hear him scratch and whine. So for his sake, as well as for her own, she tried to keep the law: but she never succeeded for long.

Clever as Dingo was, he did not understand everything. He never learned that he must not growl at Mother when she went near his basket, or slink out of reach when she called him. Besides, he hated cats with such a fierce hatred that he tried to kill them, and although Mrs. Twistleton had drowned a kitten, and said she hated pet animals, she kept Carlo in the house because he caught mice. There had been one dreadful round already between Carlo and Dingo. It happened before Peggy knew what Dingo's feelings were about cats, and she had let him follow her downstairs one day after tea. He had made one swift pounce at Carlo, and fastened his teeth in the cat's neck. Carlo had spit and scratched and fizzled like fireworks. Peggy had rushed at Dingo and lifted him up, although Carlo came too and clawed at her. Luckily Dingo had not taken hold of much except fur, so the cat dropped by its own weight and fled to the top of a bookcase, where it sat spitting and swearing while Dingo danced and yelped with rage below. Mother had been deadly quiet while the battle lasted, and she did not stir to help Peggy even when she was being scratched. But directly it was over she sent Peggy and Dingo upstairs and said that Dingo should

be thrown into the lake with a stone round his neck if it happened again.

Luckily the schoolroom wing was shut off from the rest of the house by a heavy baize door, and as long as this was shut Dingo was safe: but Peggy, who knew how quick he was, lived in fear of his escape through it. She told all the servants about the danger he ran and several times one of them brought him back to her. They all liked him, and Mrs. Butterfield often saved a bone for him. Miss Busby said he was too noisy for her taste, and left white hairs on her chair where he had no business to go, but did go when everyone was out of the room. Besides, one day he found her ball of wool on the floor and played like a kitten with it, and tried to eat the beginning of a jumper that she was going to crochet. She had to put it in the fire, and her neuralgia came on because she was so upset. Peggy was very sorry about it, and would have bought her some new wool if only she had had the money. Mabel took no interest in Dingo, and Peggy was glad of that. She wanted him all to herself. She loved him more than anything in the world, and he loved her. She talked to him indoors and ran races with him out of doors, and threw sticks for him into the lake because he could not see water without wanting to swim in it. There never had been a dog that loved water and loathed cats as Dingo did: but his rules of conduct with regard to them were made by himself or by his ancestors, and were not all that Peggy wished. They were topsy-turvy. He would dance about close to the water and bark at it: and when he was in the boat on Low Tarn he gave short shrill yelps that split your ears: but he never went in until Peggy threw a stick or gave him a little push overboard. How convenient it would have been if he had acted towards cats in the same docile way! But the sight and sound of a cat drove everything out of

Dingo's mind except the unfortunate conviction that he must live and the cat must not. He waited for no permission in sight of the enemy. He gave tongue and pounced. When the cat was plucky and experienced Dingo got scratched for his pains and no harm was done. But Peggy shivered to think of what would happen if he met a kitten or a coward. Luckily she could give him plenty of exercise without taking him near the cottages on the property or the farms outside it: and when they went beyond the garden on the fell side he could hunt rabbits and enjoy himself as much as he did in the water. Sometimes Miss Busby let her take him for a scamper while she herself walked with Mabel along the high road: and Peggy loved that. He was so busy and lively that she had to attend to him and forget about people cut off unseen and hid in sudden graves. There were no caves on the fell side where she mostly went, but there were enormous rabbit-holes. Dingo would get stuck sometimes and she had to tug at him to help him out: and when he did come out he was an object and so was she. As a rule it did not matter much. The light earth he sent back on her in showers could be mostly shaken off before she went indoors: and generally she could steal in by the back way and tidy herself in time for the schoolroom tea. Of course if she came across Mother she was made to feel a miserable sinner: but if she met Father he did not know whether she was tidy or untidy. He took very little notice of her as a rule. But one day that summer she had the surprise of her life, for she met him walking slowly along the grass path on the fell side and he stopped to speak to her.

"Why are you not with Miss Busby and Mabel?" he asked, but his manner and voice were not angry.

"They have gone to the cottages," said Peggy.

"Why didn't you go with them?"

"There are cats at the cottages."

"Don't you like cats, then?"

"I don't mind them, but if Dingo saw one he would try to kill it."

Mr. Twistleton sat down on a flat rock and weighed with both his hands on his oak stick. He had been told so constantly that Peggy was a stupid, perverse child and had seen her so everlastingly in disgrace that he had come to believe there was a good deal amiss with her. What else could be expected, since she was the image of her mother? Daphne had not been stupid till she met Major Coverdale; she had not exactly been perverse, perhaps: but she must have had perversity in her. Five years in the memory of a man of his age is not a very long time and he still thought of her bitterly. At least he did as a rule. Sometimes lately his thoughts would drift back to the early days of their marriage when he had seen her as fresh as the morning, and as young as spring amongst her books and flowers. Till her child came, the surprising change in her life had bewildered her. She had lost some of her high spirits. But when Peggy was born she gave herself up to her child happily and completely. Mr. Twistleton had felt quite secure in his marriage, partly because from his point of view Daphne had done extremely well for herself. To this day he could not see what she had gained by leaving him. Coverdale had money, he understood, but not over much. He was dead now and Daphne was presumably alone in the world. He wondered if she ever thought of her child. Peggy looked very small and young still. There was that in Mr. Twistleton's mind this afternoon that softened his heart towards her. She had a scared glance in her eyes in spite of the devilment that lighted them: and she kept out of his reach instead of running towards him.

"You look as if you had been down rabbit-holes with

the dog," said Mr. Twistleton, but he did not speak unkindly, and Peggy, recognizing this, sidled towards him. Dingo had run off to explore a low, loosely-built boundary wall dividing the fell side from a plantation of young larches belonging to Beda Close.

"I can see two squirrels," she said, pointing to one of the taller trees. "Can you see them?"

"Not without my spectacles," said Mr. Twistleton. "My eyes are not as young as yours."

Peggy wondered how old her father was, but she knew it was not polite to ask old people their age. For some reason she could not understand, they did not like it. Once when Miss Busby had a birthday she had asked her how old she was and Miss Busby had told her she was the rudest child she had ever seen. Peggy did not wish to be rude, but how were you to know things? Celia Aysgarth did not mind being asked her age. She was nine, like Peggy.

"Celia Aysgarth teaches the squirrels to come in at the schoolroom window and eat nuts," she said to her father. "She says if ever I go there she will let me see them. We shall have to sit as quiet as mice and then they will come."

"Have you never been to Tirril House, then?" said her father.

"No, never," said Peggy, with a sigh. "Mabel has been often."

"Haven't you been asked?"

"Yes, I'm always asked. I should like to go and see the squirrels. I should like to teach them to come into our schoolroom."

"Well, why don't you?"

"Nuts," said Peggy; "they eat tons of nuts and they leave the shells about. I'm afraid Miss Busby would say they made a mess. She doesn't like Dingo much because

of his hairs. I expect the squirrels wouldn't like Dingo either."

"You seem very fond of that dog," said Mr. Twistleton, for Dingo had left the wall now and made a rush into Peggy's lap.

"I love him more than anything in the world," said Peggy, cuddling his wriggling little body to her, and allowing his pink tongue to respond with affection.

"I suppose you don't remember your own mother?"

"I do," said Peggy, her whole frame tense with excitement. "Indeed I do."

"What can you remember? You were only three years old when she . . . when she died."

"I remember heaps of things . . . the color of her frock and the feel of her when I sat on her knee . . . and her voice, and eyes and hair."

"She didn't always wear the same frock."

"I remember one. It was blue, rather a dark blue like cornflowers, and it had silver threads in it, and she wore a diamond heart. . . . I saw the heart the other day."

"Where?"

"Mother wore it." Peggy's voice changed as she answered her father, and Mr. Twistleton noted the change. She had turned scared and half-sulky, as he had often seen her in his second wife's presence; but before he spoke the expression passed, and she looked up again.

"Why do you say my own mother died?" she asked, and Mr. Twistleton felt taken aback. He did not know how much Peggy had been told of the true state of affairs. His orders had been given, but who can control the tongues of busybodies and fools?

"I mean that she died to you and me," he said stiffly.

"Was she married to you?"

"Of course."

"Did you divorce her . . . like Catharine of Aragon?"

To hear a child of nine talk of divorce made Mr. Twistleton jump, until the introduction of Catharine of Aragon's name reminded him that Henry VIII.'s matrimonial adventures were as well known in schoolrooms as fairy tales.

"There was a divorce," he admitted.

"Will she ever come back?"

"Certainly not. She married a Major Coverdale, and is now a widow."

"Can't I go to her?"

"Not till you are sixteen."

"She is alive, then?"

"I believe so."

But at nine you cannot look forward to what you will do when you are sixteen. It seems a long way off, and in fact it is.

"Why can't I go now?" she asked her father, and wondered why Mr. Twistleton looked at her so oddly.

"I'm afraid I can't explain all that to you yet," he said, getting up and beginning to walk towards home. He walked slowly as if he was tired, and once on the way back he sat down to rest again.

CHAPTER VII

A GARDEN-PARTY at Beda Close was in full swing. Lawn-tennis was being played on the grass courts and on the cinder one. A croquet match was in progress on the croquet lawn. Indoors and out of doors guests were eating and drinking and looking at each other's clothes. Mr. Twistleton, the picture of depression and bodily failure, tried to do his duty as host, and Mrs. Twistleton looked as gorgeous as a portrait by Titian, in a color that was neither brown nor red, but reminded you of autumn. She did not suit the countryside, someone said of her this afternoon, and it was true. Her slow, lazy walk, her derisive glance, her clothes that made everyone else's clothes look clumsy, and her curious inanimate eyes all suggested interiors worlds away from a highly respectable house in a highly respectable neighborhood. But her guests found, as her housemates did, that although she moved slowly, she moved with a purpose and had her eyes everywhere. To some she was considerate: to others ruthless. Poor Miss Busby had put on her Sunday frock, a heavily-made khaki-colored linen that in juxtaposition to her sallow complexion was far from attractive. With it she wore a cheap but jaunty panama hat, and you wondered when you looked at her why she had been fool enough to buy it. Mrs. Twistleton allowed her to make an appearance with her two pupils, both dressed in white, and then told her to take them and two other children who were present to a remote spot in the grounds where there was a game of Spiral Pole, and keep them there.

"Do you mean all the afternoon?" Miss Busby had asked.

"Yes," said Mrs. Twistleton. "I can't do with children here."

So Miss Busby moved off, sad at heart because these instructions blighted her hopes of conversing with Mr. Crabbe, an elderly curate for whom she cherished a hopeless passion. She had imagined herself finding him rather lonely, bringing him tea and cakes, talking to him first of airy trifles, and then perhaps of better things. But alas, for the gulf that separates reality from imagination! He had a cup of tea in his hand and was talking to General and Mrs. Aysgarth when she passed close to him leading her flock. The two men took their hats off with perfunctory politeness, Mrs. Aysgarth said a pleasant word or two, and the episode was over for the afternoon. Miss Busby felt quite wicked and rebellious, but she could do nothing. The children, too, were disappointed. Mabel did not want to be conducted so far from the refreshments. Her idea of enjoyment at a party was to find a quiet corner and stoke steadily. There were strawberries and cream to be had this afternoon, and little iced cakes and peaches from Liverpool. The two strange children felt shy. Peggy had Dingo with her on a lead and was having one of those prolonged dialogues with him in which she spoke his part as well as her own, and had neither eyes nor ears for anyone else.

"I know what we'll do," said Mabel. "We'll go in the kitchen garden."

"Your mother said you were all to play Spiral Pole," said Miss Busby.

"Mother won't care what we do, as long as we keep out of her way," argued Mabel, who was capable of considerable shrewdness where her own interests were concerned. "There is a nice sunny seat in the kitchen

garden for you, Buzzie, and the gooseberries are ripe. We'll gather some for you as well as for ourselves."

"You'll make such a mess of your clothes," said Miss Busby, greatly tempted.

"No, we sha'n't. The nets have been taken off for the afternoon, so there'll be no scrambling; and gooseberries are not as squashy as strawberries or raspberries. I hate that damp, dark corner near the Spiral Pole, and there are no seats there."

"I hate it too," admitted Miss Busby, uncertain what to do. It was just like Mrs. Twistleton to have bundled them off to the dreariest corner of the garden, and Mabel's proposal was sensible and alluring. She could sit in a sunny corner and think of Mr. Crabbe, while the children made themselves happy amongst the gooseberry bushes. If her charges tore their frocks she must mend them.

"You must be very careful," she said to all four. "You will be seen again at the end of the afternoon, and it would never do if you were not clean and tidy."

"There won't be a wrinkle on any of us, I promise you," said Mabel.

Miss Busby knew that Mabel was a child who constantly and easily promised what she could not perform: but the kitchen garden door stood open, and the sun was shining there. Miss Busby found a warm delicious seat, close to some lavender bushes, soon felt drowsy, shut her eyes, and never noticed that Peggy had escaped with Dingo.

Peggy liked gooseberries, but she liked being on Low Tarn still better, and for some days she had not had a chance of escape; in fact, she had not been out by herself since she had met her father on the fell side, and he had spoken to her of her mother. She had told no one about this talk except Dingo, and she had only been able to tell him at odd moments, and when they were

by themselves: but the discovery that her mother was alive had stirred the child to the depths. Her father believed it and he must surely know. He had told her that she could go to her mother in seven years, but seven years is an interminable time. Peggy had made a sum of it in days, and every day would be as long as yesterday or to-morrow. To-day was lasting a long while, but so far it had not been unpleasant. She had got on better than usual with her lessons this morning, and at lunch Mother had been occupied with Mr. Barnes, who was staying in the house. Miss Busby said he was father's solicitor, but Peggy did not know what that meant. He lived in Manchester and had little girls of his own, he told Peggy; and he had been rather kind to her. After lunch Miss Busby had said they were not to have their usual walk, as they must keep fresh for the fatigues of the afternoon, and that she would like a nap; so Mabel and Peggy had played Demon Patience and Peggy had won. Then they had put on their best white frocks and hats and gone downstairs. Peggy had scrubbed her hands and brushed her nails most carefully, because at lunch she had seen Mr. Barnes look at her hands, and when she looked herself they were not quite as clean as his were. Grown-up people never seemed to have any difficulty with their hands: at least those who came to lunch did not. Paterson's hands were always ingrained with dirt, and Dixon's were dirty when he was cleaning the car, but they could not help it, so it would not be polite to look at them. Peggy had tried hard to keep clean herself ever since Mr. Gerard had found her all tear-stained and grubby. He had said he would come again, and she wanted him to find her looking as she did to-day, in her new white frock and best hat. If he were to come to-day and she put her arm round his neck she would not leave a mark on his collar. She wished he would come. She had written him a letter to thank him

for Dingo, but she wanted to thank him by word of mouth too.

While Peggy considered these matters she got into the boat on the tarn with Dingo and rowed to the end where there were no weeds. His yelps had been earn-splitting till he was in the water, but now he was paddling close to her with a stick in his mouth and bliss in his eyes. This was very well, but sooner or later she must beach the boat, and what would happen then? He would be all over her clean frock, barking shrilly and wanting her to throw a fresh stick into the water. He never knew when he had enough sticks and enough water, and she could only get him away by walking away herself and calling him. He would come then, sure enough, and jump up at her. What a dilemma she was in again! She saw now that she ought to have stayed in the kitchen garden with the other children, and kept her frock clean. But if she sent Dingo to the other end of the tarn she might land quickly and then keep him off with an oar till he quieted down. That seemed the best thing to do, so she shipped her oars, snatched at a stick floating within reach, stood up to throw it as far as she could, over-balanced in the act and flopped into the water. She had done this once before, and was not much afraid of drowning. There were mud holes; but in most places the tarn was only two feet deep and she was not far from shore, but the water enveloped and bewildered her for a moment, and it seemed to her as if it took a long time to scramble to her knees and then to her feet. Victor Gerard tearing through the trees to her help got a picture of the streaming, red-headed child rising from the water, of the drifting boat, the swimming dog, the sub-tropical growth of bamboos and big-leaved aquatic plants, making a thicket on the opposite side of the tarn, and of a mountain ash amongst other trees behind, with its berries beginning to turn red.

"Don't come in and get wet!" shouted Peggy, walking slowly towards him.

"I thought you were drowning," he said. "I saw you tumble in."

She reached the shore and shivered. Dingo reached the shore too, and crouched, guarding his stick between his paws and looking at her patiently.

"What am I to do?" she said in bleak despair.

"Go home and put on dry things," said Victor.

"But I can't go home without being seen."

"You can't stay here."

"But I was to keep myself clean and tidy. This is my best frock."

She looked up at Victor to find out what he thought of the situation, but she was not old enough to interpret the humorous twinkle in his eyes that gave away the severe mask of his face.

"Come along," he said. "You'll have to put up with a second-best frock for the rest of the day. If you dawdle here you'll get a chill."

Before he had finished speaking, and before he could stop her, Peggy had made a rush into the water again, followed by Dingo, barking with excitement.

"Come back!" shouted Victor in his most raucous parade voice.

"I must get the boat!" called Peggy, and he watched her wade out, get hold of it and bring it ashore. When it grounded he beached it for her, while she took Dingo's slippery body in her arms, but found she was trembling too violently with chill and shock to hold him.

"Could you carry Dingo?" she said to Victor.

"I could not," said Victor. "I'm going to the garden-party."

Her teeth were chattering with cold now, but Dingo's safety was of paramount importance. To Victor's surprise she sat down amidst the long coarse grass that

grew here and began to fumble with one of her shoe-laces.

"What the . . . didn't I tell you to come back to the house at once?" he cried, seizing her by one arm and pulling her to her feet.

"But I want to make a lead for Dingo with my shoe-lace," she argued. "I had one, but I must have left it in the kitchen garden. Have you any string?"

"I have not."

"You have a cravat . . . but perhaps you would rather not take it off?"

"I would much rather not. We'll keep an eye on Dingo. Come along at once now. I shall be late for the party as it is, and by the time you have changed your things it will be over."

"I expect I shall have to go to bed," said Peggy with dreary premonition.

"It would be the best place for you," said Victor, and signed to her to go ahead of him in a narrow path they were approaching. Their progress was necessarily slow because Peggy's wet clothes hung like lead on her: but as they went they talked of Dingo and his manifold perfections. She found that Victor had a fox-terrier called Toby, but rats were Toby's enemies, rather than cats. They agreed that this was a more convenient idiosyncrasy, for few people cherished rats.

"Have you brought him with you?" asked Peggy.

"No, I left him in Manchester," said Victor.

"Why did you? He might have made friends with Dingo and told him that rats were interesting. Perhaps if we could catch a rat and show it to Dingo. . . . Are you staying with us?"

"No. I'm staying at the Hallinwater Hotel. I walked along the lake and over the hause to-day. That's why I came past the tarn and saw you pitch into it."

"May I come with you till we get to the path that

leads to the back door? I'll go that way and you can go on to the party. We shall be able just to see the people at the corner where that path joins this one: but they won't see us. I expect you'd be ashamed to be seen with me."

"I should be proud to be seen with you. You'd be a unique object at a garden-party. If we appeared there together we should be the cynosure of every eye."

"The what?" said Peggy. "I believe you're laughing at me."

"Do you mind being laughed at?"

"Not when it's you. Your eyes are always laughing. I once saw an elephant."

"Did you, and was it laughing?"

"No; but its eyes were rather like yours. This is the place. If you stoop down and peep through those bushes you can see the house and all the people. I can see Mother. . . ."

"Well, good-by," said Victor. "Hurry on and take off your wet things."

"Dingo!" cried Peggy. "I must carry Dingo!" And before Victor could stop her she had rushed after the dog. He followed her along the broad path leading to the front of the house and saw her catch Dingo in full view of the astonished people assembled there.

CHAPTER VIII

PEGGY and Victor arrived together on the big lawn in front of the house, the lawn on which most of the seats were placed and where Mr. and Mrs. Twistleton were both standing near groups of their guests. Jordan and his assistants were carrying trays with strawberries and cream; the sun was shining, smart sunshades were unfurled, a golden haze veiled the fells and the light sparkled on every ripple of the water. Till Peggy arrived all was going well: but she brought catastrophe with her. It was startling enough to see her emerge, a pitiable little creature, dripping wet, pallid with fright and chill, and nursing a slippery fox-terrier, as the Duchess nursed the pig: but that shock was succeeded by another when the fox-terrier gave a frenzied yelp, escaped from her arms, and flashed across the lawn like a streak of lightning. Peggy dashed after him as well as she could in her clinging clothes, and Victor went after her, lifting his hat to Mrs. Twistleton as he passed by. A good many people followed to see what was the matter, for sounds of mortal conflict reached them and disturbed the peace of the afternoon. They arrived in time to see the end of the tragedy, but not to prevent it: for in a fury of blood-lust and long thwarted hate Dingo had found Carlo, fastened on his throat, deeply this time, and killed him before Peggy could interfere. Someone near had tried to beat Dingo off with a sunshade, but she might as well have tickled him with a feather. A poker would hardly detach him from a cat once he was locked in battle. Peggy had plunged upon

the adversaries without any sign of fear, and was still biting Dingo's tail, her determined impish little face nearly as white as his coat; but she had not succeeded yet in making the dog free his prey. He was still shaking it like a rat and growling happily and wickedly over the inanimate body.

"Come away," said Victor, and administered a kick to Dingo that sent him flying.

"You've hurt Dingo!" wailed Peggy.

"I wish I'd never given him to you," said Victor, and stopped short because Peggy was staring in a helpless, frightened way at her step-mother, who now arrived on the scene.

As far as Victor could see, nothing further happened at that moment that should not have happened. Mrs. Twistleton, having considerable cause for displeasure, behaved with calm. She did not even ask many questions. She told Peggy to go indoors at once and put on dry things. She sent for a gardener to remove the dead cat. She moved slowly back to the lawn with those of her guests who were near, and she talked to Victor about his walk over the haouse. In fact, she gave him the impression of being completely mistress of herself and her surroundings. He admired her and he apologized to her for having given Peggy a dog with such troublesome proclivities.

"Of course I didn't know," he said. "I wish you'd let me send you another cat."

"But that wouldn't do," he went on, as she did not speak; "some day Dingo would kill it, and as for parting Peggy and Dingo, it's unthinkable, isn't it? The child would break her heart."

It was her turn to speak and to make some suggestion, he thought; but she preserved a sphinx-like silence that was disconcerting. It made him feel as if he had floundered.

"Where did Peggy fall into the water?" she asked after a pause.

"She toppled into it from the boat on Low Tarn," he said. "I saw her. She was throwing a stick for Dingo and overbalanced herself. I was just going in after her when she came wading out."

He hoped he was not giving Peggy away, but he had to answer. Probably she ought not to have been in the water. She was evidently a child who got into mischief and needed a firm hand: but the contrast between her fearlessness in some respects and the stony terror in her eyes at times struck him as odd. However, she was not his business at present, and would not be for years to come probably: perhaps never. He rather liked her, but he was glad he had not the management of her. He wondered who was looking after her indoors and whether she would get a chill. Mrs. Twistleton did not seem to trouble much. She kept him in tow for a little while, and then introduced him to the prettiest girl present: so the rest of the afternoon passed quickly and pleasantly. He did not see Peggy again, and when he started to walk back he was not thinking of her and her troubles.

Victor Gerard was the prosperous son of a prosperous man. The father had made money at home and the son, going to Australia, had added to his inheritance. He had rushed to the colors when war broke out, fought mostly on the French front, been wounded twice, received the M.C., and now at the age of thirty-five felt uncertain what to do next. His father's business was in other hands. His own had been more or less wound up soon after his return to England. He might have to go out again for a short time, but he did not mean to stay. His only sister was married in Manchester, and he had no other ties. Since he had been demobilized in March he had made his brother-in-law's house his headquarters,

but he did not mean to live in Manchester. He did not quite know yet where he wanted to live. He was taking it easy after the war for a time. The Twistletons were old family friends, and he had heard his father's version of Henry Twistleton's disastrous marriage. He had never seen Daphne, and until he had been taken to see Peggy he had hardly known that there was a child. In April he had thought Mr. Twistleton looked a hale man for his years; but now, in July, he was shocked to see the change in him. In April Mr. Twistleton had asked him if he would consent to be executor of his will and co-guardian with Mrs. Twistleton of Peggy: and he had consented, as a young man does consent to a request of this kind, without expecting to be charged with its duties for years to come. But as he made his way back to the hotel to-night, Mr. Twistleton's drawn features and waxen pallor weighed on his mind, and he realized that he had put his hand to a task that the near future might exact of him. However, he still thought that the business of the guardianship would be financial. If her husband died Mrs. Twistleton would continue to bring up Peggy as her own child. She was a peculiar-looking woman, and though he admired her composure and her efficiency he hardly felt attracted. There was something about her eyes that he disliked and the corners of her mouth were either cruel or greedy: he hardly knew which. He knew nothing of her history or her descent. It would not have surprised him to find that she had a slight strain of black blood in her. The whites of her eyes had a blue tinge not often seen in Aryans, and her hair waved more than black hair usually does on English people.

It was a lovely summer evening. The haze had melted from the fells, leaving them clear and blue in the light of a sickle moon. The path by which Victor was making his way back to the hotel sometimes took him high above

the water and sometimes close to it. Here he crossed fields and streams, there he came out on a fell side and walked shoulder-high through bracken: for a time he clambered over moss-grown rocks lying strewn in a wood as if giants had played with them and cast them there. The trees of the wood were gnarled and twisted by rough weather, and beneath the covering of their branches it was so dark now that he had to pick his way slowly. He had got to the end of it and into the clear evening light again when he heard a rustle in the bracken just ahead of him: and going up to it he found Peggy crouched there with Dingo in her arms.

Peggy! barefoot and in her nightgown. Her eyes red with crying, her body shivering with cold, the image of misery.

"What in the name of mischief are you doing here?" he cried. "Sleep-walking?"

Peggy had risen to her feet and was looking at him with the blend of scare and hardihood that he had seen in her before.

"I was waiting for you," she said.

"What do you want with me?"

"I like you," said Peggy.

"I'm glad of that. I like you too; but I'm on my way home now, and to judge by your appearance you ought to be in bed."

"I was in bed. I had to go there before tea because I fell in the water."

"Why didn't you stay there?"

"I got out of the window."

"Got out of the window! Do you sleep on the ground floor then?"

"It isn't very high. You get hold of the wistaria and just sling yourself down. I never did it before, but I've often thought I would, and to-day I had to."

"Why didn't you put on some clothes and shoes?"

"I wanted to be quick and quiet. If they found me they'd whip me."

"Quite right too. I'd whip a child who got out of the window when I'd put it to bed."

"Would you?" Peggy's eyes looked twice their usual size as they fixed themselves on Victor's face.

"Of course I would. That sort of thing won't do. I smacked my nephew the other day when he was disobedient."

"Did he cry?"

"Not much."

"Perhaps you didn't smack hard enough."

"Perhaps I didn't. I shall know better next time."

"Look at my feet," said Peggy. And supporting herself by clutching at Victor's sleeve she stood on one foot and held up the other for his inspection. The sole of it was cut and bleeding and covered with earth.

"That's your own doing," said Victor. "What a silly child you must be to run all this way without shoes."

"They hurt," said Peggy, "but I don't mind."

Victor sat down and took the shivering little figure on his knee. She snuggled up to him and sighed. He stroked her hair.

"I detest children," he said.

She wriggled still closer within his arms.

"Especially children like you . . . always in mischief and always giving trouble. As for Dingo, I think I shall take him back to Manchester with me."

"I want you to," said Peggy.

That was the last answer that Victor expected, and he felt nonplused.

"They are going to drown him," explained Peggy, and so explained a good deal: Mrs. Twistleton's sinister silence for one thing, and the child's valiant attempt to save her friend.

"Who told you so?" asked Victor.

"Rose, the under-housemaid. She is Paterson's daughter. He was to be drowned to-night in the lake."

"How did you get hold of him?"

"He was locked up in the old potting-shed. I'm locked up there sometimes. There is one place where the wood is rotten. I made a little hole and whispered to Dingo, and he squeezed out. No one saw us. Will you take him to Manchester with you?"

"I will either do that or see that he isn't drowned."

"I think he would be safer with you."

"But wouldn't you miss him?"

That was too much for Peggy. She buried her face on Victor's shoulder and wept bitterly. He patted her and tried to comfort her as well as he could, but she did not stop until he created a diversion by looking at her feet again and saying that there was a stream close by where she could wash them.

"But what's the use?" she argued. "If I have to walk home they'll be dirty again directly."

"You are not going to walk home," said he: and the next moment wondered what he had done now. For the child gave a whoop of ecstasy, and putting both her arms round his neck smothered him with kisses. Of course Dingo, seeing and hearing the excitement, had to join in it, and jumped up at them over and over again, barking joyfully.

"When you've both quite finished, perhaps you'll tell me what the joke is," said Victor, as soon as he could get his breath. "You didn't suppose I was going to leave you out here all night, did you?"

"But you're going to take me with you to Manchester, aren't you?"

"Not for the mines of Golconda. What do you suppose I should do with you in Manchester?"

"Couldn't I live in the same house as your nephew, the one you smacked?"

"I'm afraid not. Come along, I'm going to let you wash your feet in the stream and then I'm going to carry you back."

Peggy's face had fallen and she did not speak again while she paddled over the soft, short grass to the stream close by and there held her bruised feet in a pool amongst the bowlders that Victor found for her. The water was too cold to keep them in it long, and when she had finished Victor set her on his shoulders.

"Hold tight," he said.

"They'll put a stone round Dingo's neck and drown him."

"Not if I know it."

"I don't want you to carry me."

"Why not?"

"I can walk. I walked here by myself. Then you can go straight back to the Hallinwater Hotel with Dingo."

"I don't wonder they beat you," said Victor. "You sit still and don't dare to move or speak till I say you may. Do you hear?"

"May I stroke your hair?" said Peggy.

"Oh, damn!" said Victor, who had been walking with his hat in his hand. "No, you may not!"

"It looks so smooth. I want to," said Peggy: and she did it.

CHAPTER IX

“WHAT do you think they will do to me?” said Peggy, shivering with chill and unpleasant anticipation, as they got near the house.

“What do you think you deserve?” said Victor, and tightened his hold a little. He detested children, but when the forlorn creature put her head down close to his so that he felt the warmth of her cheek and the coax of her small hand on his hair, his ideas about them seemed to dissolve in an unexpected glow.

“What would you do to me?” said Peggy.

“I should beat you.”

“You wouldn’t.” Her voice was close to his ear.

“I should.”

Her answer was to rub her cheek against his and snuggle a little closer to him than before. It would have been disconcerting if her conduct had concerned him. Luckily it did not.

“Are you going to take Dingo back with you?” she said when they got within sight of the house.

“No,” said Victor.

“Will you make them forgive him?”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“Even if they promised they might kill him after you had gone.”

“My good child——” began Victor in astonishment, but was interrupted by Peggy, who said in her flutey, matter-of-fact treble:

“Mother likes killing things.”

“Oh, nonsense!” said Victor. “I suppose you mean she shoots rabbits or pheasants—and you eat them.”

"I don't mean that," said the child, and relapsed into silence.

The house was in sight now and a minute or two later Peggy asked to be put down.

"I'm going to take you right in," said Victor.

"No . . . no," said Peggy. "Dingo and I will get in by the back way and I'll go straight to bed. I promise you I will. Perhaps they won't do anything to me till to-morrow."

"You go to sleep and don't worry," said Victor. "I'll put things straight for you this once . . . but next time, mind. . . ."

He had carried her right to the back door and watched her through it while he was recovering from the ardent embraces of parting. Then he went round the house to the front door.

What arguments he used Peggy never discovered, but next morning he was still there because he had been asked to dine and spend the night: and Dingo was not executed: and she was not punished this time: but if ever she did such a wicked thing again she would be punished severely.

"What did you say?" she asked him after breakfast, when he came up to see her for a moment and to bid her good-by. But he did not tell her and she did not have him to herself more than half a minute. Miss Busby came into the schoolroom and engaged him in silly grown-up conversation about the weather: and then Mabel peacocked in, her hair curly and arranged, her clothes neat, her manner expectant. But Victor did not turn from Peggy to her as most visitors did at once. Peggy loved him more than ever for that. He only stayed a few minutes altogether, but he let her sit on his knee and feel that they were friends. When he went she had to stand with her back to the room and pretend to look out of the window so that the others should

not see her eyes full of tears. If she had not had Dingo left the world would have been gray and empty that day.

After this, for a long while, life went on as usual: except that it became plainer, even to the schoolroom, that Mr. Twistleton was ill. Lunch-parties went on even when the host could not be present: and some people came to stay, but as a rule did not stay long. Mrs. Twistleton could not live like a recluse because her husband was in a bad state of health, said Miss Busby to Jordan when they had a little conversation one day: and he seemed to agree with her. But Mrs. Butterfield in discussing the question with him said she had her own opinion, and would keep it to herself. A woman who could see her husband suffer as the master did and be thinking about prawns in aspic and fal-de-lals all the time was a woman who had a stone where her heart should be. No doubt a stone is more comfortable inside you than a soft, easily-upset organ like a heart: but Mrs. Butterfield felt sorry for the old man, though he had been a hard one in his time. The nurses said he suffered torments, and his eyes were like a dog's, asking, when his wife came near. But she never turned a hair or lost an hour's sleep, or a meal with its courses. A wonderful woman, one of the nurses said, who was a fool. The other, who was not a fool, said nothing.

So, as far as Peggy was concerned, the King of Terrors was on the threshold of the house and her old imaginary fears became as painted shadows compared with this grim reality. Miss Busby talked in whispers to the nurses and servants: whispers that the children could overhear. A great surgeon and another doctor came from Manchester, and the schoolroom, peeping through a door, saw them arrive. Next morning Mrs. Twistleton, coming into the schoolroom for a moment, found Miss Busby in a state of emotion that apparently

made the usual morning lessons out of question: for Peggy, looking pale and scared, was hugging Dingo in the window, and Mabel, unmoved and unoccupied, sat on the table swinging her legs.

"What is happening here?" said Mrs. Twistleton.

"I thought . . . I thought . . ." stammered Miss Busby. "It is so difficult to fix the attention. . . ."

Mrs. Twistleton looked at the governess and then at the watch on her wrist.

"You are half an hour late," she said, "but you can go on till one to-day. I want two of the children's frocks, please . . . their last new white ones."

Miss Busby pulled herself together, fetched the frocks, and when Mrs. Twistleton had gone heaved a heavy sigh and started an arithmetic lesson. That is to say, she set the children sums and while they did them let her thoughts wander to the frocks. Why had Mrs. Twistleton taken them? As patterns? But no new ones would be wanted unless. . . . Cold blooded! Yes: to be sure Mrs. Twistleton was cold-blooded. But she did not know yet whether her husband would live or die. If he survived the operation to be performed this morning, he might live as an invalid for months to come. Jordan, quoting the nurses, had said so.

The stable clock struck eleven. Rose, the housemaid, brought in biscuits and milk and seemed to bring in with them a strange clinging scent that filled the room.

"What is it?" said Mabel. "I don't like it."

"It's the anesthetic," said Miss Busby. "Ether or chloroform, or both."

"What is an anesthetic?" asked Peggy, who had an ear for words and had followed this unknown one carefully, though her tongue stumbled a little over it.

"Doctors give it you to deaden pain. You go to sleep and feel nothing they do . . . not even if they cut off your leg."

Peggy shuddered.

"But when you wake . . . then you feel?"

"Go on with your sums and don't chatter," said Miss Busby.

At lunch the two doctors were present and Mrs. Twistleton conversed with them while the schoolroom ate in silence and asked no questions. But after lunch Jordan came upstairs and spoke to Miss Busby in whispers. His face was grave. Peggy tried to hear what he said, but could only catch disjointed sentences . . . something about someone "sinking," and then again, "not through the night." What did "sinking" mean? If anyone tied a stone round Dingo's neck and threw him into the lake he would sink: but Dingo was here safe and sound.

"Is Father worse?" she asked.

Her father had not played any part in her little life that bound her warmly to him. He had never stood between her and the chill rigors of her step-mother's rule. Although Mabel was not his child he had persistently made Mabel his favorite: losing no opportunity of contrasting her with Peggy to Peggy's disadvantage. Mabel's pinafore was always clean and smooth: Mabel's hair was always tidy: her hands were clean: her shoes were neat: her face was rosy and smiling. How was it that Peggy could or would not follow her step-sister's good example, and be beloved instead of constantly scolded and punished?

She was not so much moved by affection as by terror and pity, and by the sight of Miss Busby's commotion. She wondered what was happening to her father.

"He is very ill," said Miss Busby, and buttoned her mouth in a way both children knew. It meant that she had information they were not to share, and it always annoyed them.

"Will he get better?" asked Mabel, and was told that

while there was life there was hope, and that it was time for the daily afternoon walk.

"I think it's rather heartless to do lessons and go for walks just as usual when Father is dying," said Mabel, who had an uncanny knack of expressing what Miss Busby felt, but dared not say, and thereby playing up to her.

The next moment she was locked with Peggy in a scuffle that ruffled her hair, incarnadined her cheeks and tore her pinafore before Miss Busby could stop it by pulling the smaller girl violently away from the bigger one.

"She sha'n't say Father is dying!" panted Peggy. "It isn't true."

"She has torn my pinafore!" wailed Mabel, and was not appeased by being told that Peggy should be made to mend it: for Mabel was a needlewoman already and Peggy was not. However, after a little argument Miss Busby got her pupils out for a walk, and in the open air it seemed to Peggy that the world was alive again.

But when they got back the house still smelt of ether and still brooded silently as it had done since the morning. Servants hardly showed themselves, and, if they did, spoke in whispers. Mrs. Twistleton was invisible. The two doctors had gone. The schoolroom tea was like a funeral feast, silent and awe-stricken. For once Peggy was glad when bedtime came. Bed was comfortable, and you could tell yourself what stories you pleased as you went to sleep: stories of fairies and witches and talking birds and beasts, and of children like Snow White, who after being cruelly treated came by their own.

It was neither dark nor light, but earliest dawn when Peggy was waked violently out of sleep and sitting up in bed saw her step-mother. Mrs. Twistleton's face looked spectral to the child, angry and hard set, with a

greenish pallor on it that had for a crown the black masses of her hair. Peggy wanted to shriek and could not. She thought that her last hour had come and that she was to be murdered as the little boy had been: the one who had been troublesome and was well out of the way.

"Get up," said Mrs. Twistleton. "Be quick! Your father wants to see you."

Which was worse, the receding imaginary terror or this real one clutching at her? Death itself awaited her close by and she was summoned to look upon it. She knew that from what she saw in her step-mother's face.

"Must I come?" she asked with a shiver.

"Don't you want to?" said Mrs. Twistleton, and looked at the child with curiosity but not with pity.

"Is Father dying?"

"Yes. If you are not quick. . . ."

"I'm afraid."

"I can't help that. You must come."

The child crept out of bed and followed the woman through the schoolroom wing and along the corridor leading to the chief bedrooms on that floor. She followed barefoot and in her nightgown, her heart beating with fright and her small body cold. She did not know what she was to see. Her feet carried her on and her fears turned her back: but at last a door was reached and gently opened. She saw two nurses, one on either side of the bed. She saw an open window and the blessed morning light stealing upon the hills. In the room itself the air felt heavy and drugged, and when she looked at the bed she saw her father lying there still and patient as she had never seen him before. He opened his eyes when she came in and fixed them on her face. But she spoke to his wife.

"I want to be left alone with Peggy," he said.

The two nurses moved to leave the room at once, and

after a moment's hesitation Mrs. Twistleton followed them: but her manner showed that she did so grudgingly.

"Don't come near the bed," said the dying man when the door had shut. "If you touch it you'll hurt me. Can you understand what I say? You needn't look so scared. I can't hurt anyone."

Peggy stole as close to the bed as she could without touching it. She suddenly felt sorry for her father: more sorry than afraid.

"I wish you would get better," she said.

"So do I: and I wish you were a little older. But it can't be helped. You must try to remember what I tell you. When I am gone your step-mother and Mr. Gerard will be your guardians. You can go to Mr. Gerard if you want help. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Peggy, not understanding much, but seizing the main fact that Mr. Gerard would stand her friend.

"Some day you will go back to your mother," Mr. Twistleton went on. His voice was weak but clear, and Peggy did not know what a supreme effort he was making for her sake. He had nearly reached the limit of it.

"I should like to go now," the child said.

"The sooner the better."

The words came through his teeth on his failing breath so that Peggy hardly caught them. She crept a little closer still, but did not speak. His eyes had closed again and she could hardly hear him breathe. When her step-mother and the nurses came back a moment later they found her standing there wide-eyed and chill, but seemingly not afraid. One of the nurses took her back to her own room and put her to bed.

CHAPTER X

IT was broad daylight when Peggy waked again and time to get up: some hours of sound sleep interposed themselves between her and the dolorous memories of the night, but there remained enough to make a cleft between the past, when she had never looked on death, and the future, sure at times to show it her as in a mirror.

"Your father died in the night," said Miss Busby, when she came to call her to the bathroom.

"I saw him," said Peggy, and as Miss Busby looked incredulous, she added, "Mother fetched me in the middle of the night."

"We shall both have to wear mourning," said Mabel, who had come in too and was listening. "Father was very fond of me."

"Yes," said Peggy.

"I don't wish to be unkind——"

"Especially at such a time as this," put in Miss Busby hurriedly.

"Especially at such a time as this," echoed Mabel, "but to tell the truth, I don't think he cared about you much."

"He did," said Peggy. "Twice I knew that he did. Once, a long time ago, when he found Dingo and me on the fell and talked to me: and then again last night."

"Well, twice isn't much," said Mabel; "I was his favorite."

Peggy could not deny it, but she would have said or done something to annoy Mabel if Miss Busby had not hauled her off to the bathroom.

"To squabble at such a time as this!"

Miss Busby was surprised and horrified at the depravity of human nature. She spoke in a whisper and moved on tip-toe even in the schoolroom wing. Why? It was irritating, Peggy found, and made her want to run out of doors and shout. The sun was shining, the sky was blue, the world went round. She did not understand.

"What is to be done about the children's mourning?" Miss Busby asked discreetly when Mrs. Twistleton appeared in the schoolroom in the middle of the morning.

"I ordered it yesterday. It is promised for Thursday."

"We can easily keep out of sight until then."

"Why should you? I suppose you will want your lunch as usual."

"I thought if many people were coming to and fro. . . ."

"People will come to the funeral. Mr. Gerard arrives to-morrow. I expect no one else."

Peggy had pricked up her ears at Victor's name.

"Will he walk here?" she said.

"Don't be silly! He is coming from Manchester," said Mrs. Twistleton.

"May I go in the car to meet him?" she said, quaking inwardly at her own forwardness.

Mrs. Twistleton looked at her. "You!" she said. "Why should you go to meet Mr. Gerard? I'm going in to Senwick myself, and if I take anyone it will be Mabel."

Of course it was Mabel. It was always Mabel, dressed up like a peacock and giving herself airs. He would talk to her and think her pretty and never discover that she was as stupid as a doll: one of those bleating ones that cry "Mamma!" and shut their idiotic eyes. Was he going to be Mabel's guardian too now that Father was dead?

"What is a guardian?" said Peggy when she sat at tea that afternoon with Miss Busby.

"Someone who takes the place of a father," said Miss Busby, putting it shortly.

"Mr. Gerard and Mother are my guardians," said Peggy. "I mean this Mother, not the other one."

Miss Busby pursed her mouth as if she wished it to say "prunes and prisms." She had heard just enough about Peggy's "other Mother" to consider her an improper subject for conversation: and she thought it unfortunate that the child should know of her existence.

"Will Mr. Gerard come here to live?" continued Peggy meditatively.

"Why should he?"

"How can he take Father's place if he doesn't? Will he marry Mother . . . this Mother? I hope not."

"You are the most heartless child I ever knew," cried Miss Busby. "There is your poor father lying dead next door and you talk of your step-mother's marriage. And your mourning ordered before the breath was out of his body . . . poor good man."

"I'd forgotten," said Peggy penitently; "I was thinking of Mr. Gerard. I don't want him to be Mabel's guardian."

"Why not? What is Mr. Gerard to you?"

"I like him better than anyone in the world except Dingo. Perhaps I like them equally. No; I like Dingo the very best because he is my own."

"I adore Mr. Gerard," said Mabel affectedly when she came upstairs at six o'clock. "I've promised to show him the short way up Banner Fell to-morrow."

"I don't believe you know it," said Peggy.

"I do."

"You are always too lazy to go."

"With you! It's not amusing. Besides, Mr. Gerard

is not a child of nine. He'll give me a hand in the difficult places."

"There are no difficult places, silly."

"Oh, you're jealous! I thought you would be," said Mabel, and with her head in the air marched out of the room.

"I wish you and Mabel would not squabble so much," said Miss Busby, putting down the novel in which she had been engrossed. "At such a time as this——"

She did not finish her sentence, for Peggy gave a little squeal of joy because the door opened and Victor walked in.

"Really, Peggy, you might be a fox-terrier yourself," he said, when he had recovered from her welcome. "Why did you kick me?"

"I didn't," she said, standing close within his arm when he sat down, "but I couldn't reach, and you didn't stoop quick enough, and I was so glad to see you. . . ."

"So you tried to climb up me . . . just like Dingo. How is he? No, don't fetch him. I must go downstairs directly. I shall see you again to-morrow."

"I wish you could stay now," said Peggy.

"Why are you all skin and bones?" he said, looking at her. "Mabel is plump enough. Does she eat all your pudding? Why is this child so thin, Miss Busby?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Miss Busby, looking rather offended; "she was ordered cod liver oil but she refuses to take it: and unless Mrs. Twistleton herself comes up and stands over her or pours it down her throat . . . she did for a week or two, but she has had other things to think of lately. . . ."

"I hate it," said Peggy, with a wriggle of disgust.

"So do I," said Victor, whispering in her ear; then he got up to go, without having said a word about her father's death or made any reference to "such a time as

this." At least he had said nothing that Miss Busby could hear or repeat: but he had said all Peggy had wanted him to say, to her only. His eyes had told her that he was sorry for her because she was fatherless, and when he had put his arm round her he had given her a promise of affection that left a glow in her little heart. She wished she could be with him always.

When Victor went downstairs he found Mrs. Twistleton waiting for him in her own room. He had not been there before, and he thought as he went in that she was a difficult woman to understand. He did not like her, but he admired her looks, the apparent placidity of her temper and her clever hospitality. She seemed to know what a man wanted, she dressed seductively, and her room was comfort itself. Just the kind of chair he liked was there for him, and as she was smoking herself, he could smoke too. A wood fire had been lighted and scented the air pleasantly. Through the window he could see the lake and the last rays of sunset reddening the sky and the hills. That Mrs. Twistleton should be sitting there in what looked like a chemise of purple and gold, with her neck and arms bare and a double row of pearls around her throat, was not really odd when he came to think of it. Her black trappings could not have arrived yet: hardly have been ordered. But her air was expectant and alert. She did not sit there with sorrow, though she was decorously quiet.

"I thought that after dinner you would be busy with my husband's papers and that we could have half an hour now," she said.

It was so plain that she wanted to talk business that Victor made no attempt to beat about the bush.

"I saw Mr. Barnes yesterday," he said. "He has given me a copy of Mr. Twistleton's will and a statement of his affairs. He wished me to express his regret that he could not come to the funeral to-day. He has

had a bad bout of influenza. He thinks he could get over next week if you wish to see him."

"Of course I must see him," said Mrs. Twistleton. "What are the terms of the will?"

Victor saw that the woman was in a state of intense excitement. The pupils of her eyes had become quite small, her hands were clenched, and though she controlled her voice as well as she could, it was charged with emotion.

"Mr. Twistleton has provided generously for you and Mabel," he said, thinking her anxiety had some cause and wishing to reassure her. But the effect of his words was unexpected.

"He once said that he would leave me everything," she cried.

"He has left you five thousand a year for life and fifty thousand in trust for Mabel. That will be settled on her when she marries."

"Do you mean to say that I have no control over the capital? That I have nothing but an income of five thousand a year?"

"You have this house for life."

"Can't I sell it?"

"No. At your death it goes to Peggy."

For a moment Mrs. Twistleton did not speak, but at Peggy's name her heavy eyelids closed a little over her eyes and narrowed them.

"How is Peggy provided for?" she asked presently.

"She has the residue."

"What will that be?"

"I can't quite tell you. The death duties will be heavy and there is a great deal to settle and arrange. Mr. Barnes estimates Peggy's share at a quarter of a million, but he isn't certain yet. It depends partly on the sale of a block of warehouses——"

"Am I to understand that I only get five thousand a

year and that Mabel is put off with fifty thousand while a quarter of a million goes to Peggy?"

"She is Mr. Twistleton's child."

"By a harlot."

"Peggy can't help that."

They had both spoken with some haste and heat, and a moment of uncomfortable silence embarrassed them before either spoke again. Mrs. Twistleton's placid eyes were fixed again in watchfulness, but Victor had seen them flash with anger and had seen her mouth cruel with rage. The glimpse of smoldering passion beneath that self-controlled indolent manner had startled him and sown the first seeds of uneasiness and distrust.

"What would become of the money if Peggy should die?" she asked after a pause.

"It would be divided. Mabel and Peggy's cousins would have equal shares."

He wished he need not have given her this information, but it was useless to withhold it. She would find it in her husband's will.

"Did my husband tell you what his arrangements were this spring when he asked you to be his executor?"

"Yes, he did," said Victor.

"Didn't you remonstrate with him?"

"It was not my business to. He had discussed everything with Mr. Barnes and probably taken his advice."

"I've no doubt of it," said Mrs. Twistleton bitterly. "Odious old man! I should have had a better marriage settlement if it had not been for him. However, it can't be helped. Of course I shall have to live in a smaller way. Five thousand a year doesn't go far nowadays: and I have Mabel to educate. By the way, will the interest of her fifty thousand come to me till she marries or is of age?"

Victor hesitated. "I forgot to ask Mr. Barnes that,"

he said. "I don't know. I should think some arrangement might be made."

"Certainly some arrangement must be made for both children. I must see Mr. Barnes as soon as possible. I wonder why my husband asked you to be Peggy's guardian and what your function will be?"

"He asked me because I was the son of his old friend."

"You can't know much about children," she said.

"I know nothing about them."

"I suppose you will invest and administer her money and I shall have charge of her?"

"I had not contemplated removing her . . . at present."

"I suppose we have equal authority?"

"Not quite. If we disagree I may act as I think best."

Mrs. Twistleton looked at the young man again. His voice was urbane: almost deprecatory: and his eyes had a humorous light in them. But she judged that his voice and his eyes and every line of his pleasant face might harden in conflict and that he would not be an easy man to oppose.

"I am sure we shall agree," she said. "You admit that you know nothing of children, and I know nothing of money matters. Our departments are watertight and we will not interfere with each other."

CHAPTER XI

THE funeral was over, the guests had departed, and Victor, who was staying till next day, went out into the garden for a smoke and a stroll. It was a late October afternoon, and all the sunshine of summer seemed still to gild the trees. Their leaves fell in gentle showers as he passed beneath them, and they covered the paths wherever they were not swept away. He soon got beyond the garden to some wilder land that belonged to Beda Close but was not enclosed, and from that to the old grass walk at the foot of the fells where the bracken was golden and the rabbits scampered from rock to rock as he approached their lairs.

He had had a busy time of it since his arrival, and he had seen a great deal of Mrs. Twistleton and next to nothing of Peggy. Even when Mabel showed him the way up Banner Fell the younger child had not accompanied them, and when he asked why, he had been told that she had been kept in as a punishment.

"What had she done?" said Victor.

"She put out her tongue at me," said Mabel. "We all try to teach Peggy manners, but we don't succeed. Mother says it is not surprising and that there is no knowing how she will turn out . . . if she ever grows up."

"Why shouldn't she grow up?"

"Mother says she has no constitution. She is always getting colds. I don't. I went through the whole of last winter without one. Besides, I am not excitable, like Peggy. Mother says I have an even temperament.

Peggy is always in extremes. If you had seen her just now you would have thought her heart was broken."

"What about?"

"This walk. She wanted to come. She has one of her violent manias for you. Mother says that kind of thing must be stopped at once. It is so unbalanced. Besides, it is troublesome. Mother told her that you could not possibly want a child of nine running after you, and that if you did want her you would send for her."

Victor was thinking of this idle chatter as he sauntered along the grass path at the foot of the fells. He did not take to Mabel. She was too smug and well pleased with herself to please him. Not a hair of her head or a fold in her frock had been disarranged as she walked up Banner Fell; but she had not walked far. She had soon said she was rather tired to-day and would sit down while he went on to the top. So he sat down with her for a few minutes, and then took her back to the house. She bored him and confirmed him in his ideas about disliking children; especially girls. Vain, empty-headed creatures they were: and grew into women without undergoing a great change presumably. At least he thought Mabel would. Mrs. Twistleton was no fool. He had found her clear-headed where business was concerned and as hard as nails. She was not satisfied with the terms of her husband's will and she fought every debatable point with a keen eye to her own advantage. As Beda Close was hers for life she would let it furnished, she said, and add the large rent it would bring to her income.

"But what will you do?" Victor had asked.

"I think of going abroad next year for a time and then I shall take a flat in London. You can't educate girls in the country."

"But while you travel?"

"The children will travel too. They will learn French and Italian. It will be good for them. Of course you must allow me enough for Peggy's expenses."

"I'm not sure that I like the idea for Peggy," Victor had said, and Mrs. Twistleton had not answered. It was not necessary. She had told him what she wished to do and she meant to do it. He could not stop her. Her silence and the tightened lines of her mouth told him this while her odd eyes remained as expressionless as usual. She went on to talk of other things.

It is easy enough to look after yourself, thought Victor as he sauntered on. It is when you undertake to look after other people that your troubles begin. So far he had not found in it in his heart to want a wife and children of his own. He had not reached his present age without being attracted by women, but he had never asked one to marry him. Marriage meant bondage for both contracting parties, while as for children. . . ! The wonder was that the human race went on, considering the trouble the creatures were to rear. He would put every one of them into huge state nurseries and schools where they would annoy no one but paid officials and all have an equal chance. Such a scheme would please the poor and relieve the rich. Why did no one work it out? He supposed the women would object, and in these days women had a voice in everything. There were too many of them in this country. He would go back to some wilder land where a man could live amongst men. But if he did he would have to resign this trust that he had accepted so rashly. He could not live in East Africa, for instance, and look after Peggy, on Hallinwater. He would have to go to Australia again before long, and then he had a mind to look at East Africa and the big game there. He must consult Mr. Barnes about his duties with regard to Peggy, for he was not really clear about them. But of course he must either perform them

scrupulously or transfer them to other hands. What could the child's mother have been made of to desert her? Women were often hard, heartless creatures: more so than men. They were constantly exploding the fiction of their softness and their helplessness by conduct that men would repudiate. He might any moment find Mrs. Twistleton a hard nut to crack. She was evidently furious about the terms of the will: and what was this chatter of Mabel's about Peggy's constitution? Certainly the child looked thin and scared. He must see her again before he went back to Manchester since he was to be saddled with her affairs. She came down to lunch every day, dressed like a little crow, and sat at table without opening her mouth: but he had seen other children as silent in other houses. That was a canon of behavior he had no quarrel with. But there was a look in this child's eyes that should not have been there. He did not know what he could do to help her, and probably there was nothing much wrong. In talking to him Mrs. Twistleton had taken for granted that she would live with her step-mother till she was sixteen, when she would be free to go to her own mother if she chose, and if Victor approved. He wondered again what sort of woman the mother was: and taking a sudden decision he turned, walked swiftly back to the house, and made his way to the schoolroom, where he found Peggy, very red about the eyes, with a tattered book in her hands and Dingo close to her on the window-seat.

"Why are you not out this fine afternoon?" he said.

"I'm kept in," said Peggy.

"Would you like to come out with me . . . on the lake?"

"Not really?"

"Go and put on your hat and mind you look in the glass."

"Why?"

"Good children never ask why. They do as they are told."

"I'm not good. I never shall be."

"Who says so?"

"Everyone. I don't care."

Peggy sighed and looked at the verses she had been told to learn and did not know yet. She had had plenty of time to learn them, but she had played with Dingo instead, because she thought she had the afternoon before her. That was the way things happened.

"I don't know my verses. I shall be punished," she said.

"Who will punish you? Miss Busby?"

Peggy shook her head. "Mother," she said under her breath.

"I'll see that you are not punished to-day," said Victor. "Be quick and get ready."

He could tell that Peggy only half believed him, but she trotted off, followed by Dingo: and when she came back she had washed the tear-stains from her face, as he meant her to when he told her to look in the glass. While she was away he thought about what she had said and wished he knew what to do. There did not seem anything to be done in a hurry: and he was probably a fool to feel at all uneasy about the child. She must lead the same life as Mabel, that petted doll. She occupied the same rooms, was taught by the same governess, ate at the same table. Her clothes were good. she was allowed to keep Dingo. Why did she seem all nerves and jumps? Why was she such a little bag of bones? He had an idea.

"Whom do you like best in the world?" he said.

"Dingo and you."

"But after us?"

"Mrs. Butterfield."

"Who is she?"

"Our cook. She lives downstairs mostly, but I go and see her when Miss Busby and Mabel are out. Sometimes I sit on her knee in a rocking-chair and we both go to sleep. On my birthday she gave me things to eat because I was hungry, although it was as much as her place was worth. Don't you remember? I told you about it when you came to see me on my birthday and you promised not to tell: and she knew my real mother: and on the mantelpiece she has a bottle with a ship in it. Her nephew Jo is a sailor and made the ship and got it into the bottle. She would show it you if we went downstairs, I expect. Have you ever seen a ship in a bottle?"

"I'm not sure that I have," said Victor. "Take me to see this one."

Luckily Mrs. Butterfield was in the hall writing a letter when Victor and Peggy went in: an elderly woman, Victor found, unlettered but shrewd and kindly. She allowed Peggy to exhibit the ship in the bottle, and then let her run upstairs for a box made of shells that was a yet greater treasure.

"You are staying on, I hope?" said Victor.

"As far as I know," said Mrs. Butterfield. "But of course there may be changes."

Victor looked round the room. It was the servants' hall and he sat here talking to the cook; if he could bring it about he wanted to take her into his confidence. An unimaginable situation arising out of his new relation to a child, and confirming him in his conviction that children gave more trouble than they were worth.

"I am Miss Peggy's guardian," he said.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mrs. Butterfield. "She wants one."

"Well . . . she had her father till he died."

Mrs. Butterfield made a slight noise in her throat that might have meant anything.

"You're not going to live here, sir, are you?" she inquired.

"No. I live in Manchester at present. I have to go back to-morrow."

"Then, if I may ask, what good are you going to be to Miss Peggy?"

"I shall look after her money affairs."

The noise Mrs. Butterfield made in her throat when she heard this was more definite. It might have been called a snort.

"What's a mite like that got to do with money affairs? Sixpence a week and as much food as'd feed a sparrer. . . ."

"But she will grow up."

"She may, or she may not. There's no knowing."

Victor did not know what to say next. The cook had not given him any facts to go on, but she had made him more uneasy than he had been before.

"The child is very fond of you——" he began.

"Poor little soul!" said Mrs. Butterfield.

"Why do you pity her?"

"Who's she got in the world? Me and a fox-terrier! It isn't much, is it? Why can't she be sent straight to her mother?"

"Her mother deserted her."

"Begging your pardon, sir, she did nothing of the sort. When the master locked the door against her she come round to the back and stood there in the snow crying for the child. I ought to know. I spoke to her last of anyone. But the child had been sent away."

Victor listened in silence and without asking the questions he wanted to ask. He had never seen the first Mrs. Twistleton or heard much about her: but his present ideas about women and children inclined him to judge hardly of a faithless wife.

"Mr. Twistleton took for granted that Miss Peggy

would live on here," he said, after a little consideration. "Mrs. Twistleton and I are acting together as her guardians."

The cook preserved a stony silence, and stared out of the window: and before either of them spoke again Peggy rushed into the room with the shell box. Victor, feeling that he had not made a success of his incursion below stairs, admired it, shook hands with Mrs. Butterfield, and then took Peggy on the lake for half an hour. He let her have one oar and gave her a lesson in rowing, the first she had ever had, for she had taught herself to paddle about Low Tarn.

"You don't come out on the lake by yourself, I hope?" he said, as they turned homewards.

"I never have, but I will now," said Peggy.

"You will not."

"Why not?"

"There you are . . . asking why again. Children should never argue."

"But then they would never understand anything. You don't know much about children . . . do you?"

"I know enough to forbid you to go on the lake by yourself. Do you understand that?"

"Are you angry?" said Peggy with a sigh.

"No: why should I be?"

"You shouted at me."

"I beg your pardon. I didn't know I did. Don't you like being shouted at?"

"I don't mind. If I came to live with you——"

"Which you are not going to do."

"But I may think about it and tell myself stories about it as if I was going to. If only you would wait about eight or nine years. . . ."

"What for?"

"For me. I should be old enough then to be married,

and I could marry you. . . . Do you think you would like it?"

"Speaking as one friend to another, Peggy, I don't think I should. I'm not a marrying man."

"What a pity!" said Peggy.

CHAPTER XII

PEGGY was not asked to say her verses that night and not punished. That was through Mr. Gerard.

Even Mother had to do as he told her. How Peggy wished he would stay! But next morning he went back to Manchester by an early train and it rained all day. Dingo escaped into the garden, scampered across the flower-beds, came back all wet and muddy and jumped on her lap before she could stop him. Just before the gong went for lunch, too, when she had on a clean pinafore and was ready to go down. Miss Busby said that never in her life had she come across such a tiresome child or such an odious dog, and she wished the dog was drowned. She tried to clean up the child with a towel, but she only made her more smeary, and then she got flustered and said they would be late and must go down at once.

They were late. Jordan had a sad face and Mother looked like thunder: thunder that discharged itself on Peggy's head when she appeared with a muddy pinafore. Before she knew what was going to happen she found herself pushed through the doorway and told to make herself tidy or keep out of sight. She was dreadfully hungry and the smell of cooking made her hungrier, but she had to go although she did not know where to find a pinafore. Miss Busby had charge of the schoolroom clothes and she was not methodical in her ways. So Peggy had to hunt here and there for what she wanted and then do the buttons at the back without help. It took a long time, and all the while she was thinking how

hungry she was and how she hoped the others would eat slowly. But they must have gobbled, for when she slid into her place at table Jordan was handing round apple snow. Peggy liked apple snow at the end of lunch, but not at the beginning: so when it was handed to her she looked at Mother.

"Don't you want any?" said Mrs. Twistleton.

"I've had no meat," said Peggy.

"You should have been here in time," said Mrs. Twistleton.

So Peggy got nothing for lunch but apple snow: not even bread or toast: and she went upstairs unsatisfied. She would have gone down to Mrs. Butterfield if she could have escaped; but as they left the dining-room Mrs. Twistleton told Miss Busby that she was to take the children a brisk walk and start at once, while there was a lull in the weather. Miss Busby hated walks directly after lunch, but she had to go. So she was rather cross, and when Peggy showed her that her torn mackintosh had not been mended she became crosser still and told her to leave it at home.

"Peggy's clothes are always in the wars," fluted Mabel, who looked trim and snug in her new Burberry.

"Mine was old when I had it," argued Peggy. "You had made a little tear. If that had been mended. . . ."

Miss Busby, looking more affronted than before, said she would have no squabbling and that she supposed they had better start and get it over. So they set out, keeping to the high road beside the lake, a walk Peggy always avoided if she could. Why anyone should take the road when they could keep to the fell side she could not understand; but Miss Busby and Mabel both preferred it. Peggy did not feel at all brisk because she was so hungry, and when the others turned to go home she began to lag behind. By that time she was too tired and exhausted to keep up with them. Dingo enjoyed

his walk thoroughly, and kept running back to tell her so, with his tail in the air and his head on one side. But his legs and his underneath were coated with mud as they would not have been if they had kept on the clean short grass of the fells. The bracken might have made him wet, but bracken was not muddy like this horrid road. Peggy thought it must be the road that made her head ache and her limbs feel lazy and heavy. She tried to keep up with the others, and for some time did keep them in sight: but they did not look back or try to hurry her on. She was glad of that because she did not think she could have walked any quicker. She knew her way. Perhaps they hurried when it began to rain harder. Such rain it was! Sheets of it coming down straight from a black sky and drenching you to the skin in no time. There wasn't a soul to be seen either on the road or on the lake. Peggy and Dingo were alone with it, and it seemed stronger than her, like the sea. It took her breath away. She could hear nothing else, and the hills were blurred by it and the lake was one with it. Dingo looked as if he had no coat for he was soaked through and through. He shivered with cold and plodded on as much as to say, "Water is my element and can't frighten me." But he hated it really. So he and Peggy huddled under a tree together and hoped it would not thunder and lighten. But presently it did, and Dingo hated that worse than the rain. He trembled with excitement and gave little whines of misery: which showed Peggy that he felt just as she did: except perhaps that he was not quite as cold. Peggy was chattering with cold by this time, but she stayed under the tree until she thought there would be no more thunder and lightning. Then she set out for home, her boots squishy with water, her hat sending trickles down her face and neck. She knew that her new black coat would probably never look new again, but she could not think much about that yet, or

even about her probable reception when she arrived streaming, like Undine rising from the river. All she could think of was the warmth and shelter indoors for which every bit of her body craved, of dry clothes and hot tea and bread and butter. Not that she was as hungry now as she had been when she came out. She would try to get round by the back and find Mrs. Butterfield, who might say she did not want muddy dogs and children messing up her floors but was sure to help her somehow. She wished someone would drive by and give her a lift, for there was a long way to go and the desolate road stretched ahead of her unfriendly and inanimate. She knew it inch by inch, but she could not know who might be lurking on it to-day. She listened eagerly for sounds.

Before she had gone far she heard a car coming in her direction, and knew by its hoot and its whir that it was probably their own. She called Dingo to her and waited well out in the road so that Dixon, the chauffeur, should see her, because she knew that if it was empty he would stop for her. When he got close enough she waved to him, and to her relief and joy he slowed down and then came to a standstill. But her relief and joy were short-lived. Mrs. Twistleton was in the car and, pulling down the window, looked at the miserable little object in the road.

"What are you doing there?" she said.

"I'm going home," said Peggy.

"Speak louder. How can I hear you when you mumble like that!"

Peggy sidled closer to the car, looked at it longingly, and again informed her step-mother that she was going home.

"How is it that you are out here by yourself?"

"The others went quicker."

To Peggy's bitter disappointment, the window was

pulled up again, Dixon was told through the speaking-tube to go on at once, and the car began to move. For a moment Peggy wondered if she dared climb on to the step and over the door in front, and she might have done it if it had not been for Dingo and if anyone but her step-mother had been inside. But Dingo would try to follow her and anything might happen to him: and her step-mother would probably order her off again. The car had lately been done up, the cushions were new, and Peggy recognized that in her present dripping state she was not good for cushions. The dye might come out of her coat on them. Still, she did wish she could have got up in front beside Dixon. She would have sat on a rug; that would not have mattered as much as cushions. However, it was no use wishing. The car was out of sight already and the road longer and drearier than it had been before. By the time she had dragged along the breadth of a field on her left she knew that her step-mother must be safe at home and Dixon probably having his tea in his cottage. He would not know how very tired and wet and cold she was, although he had a little girl of her age and made a great pet of her. She was spoiled, Miss Busby said. Peggy's ideas began to wander and break off queerly. From Ada Dixon who was spoiled they jumped to Mr. Gerard. If she shut her eyes a little she could see him and hear his voice and pretend he was saying things to her. He told her to go on and not to be silly. If he was there he would pull her arm through his and make her walk straight and quick. She was beginning to stumble now and the rain was getting heavier again. Dingo kept beside her, but he did not know there was anything wrong. Peggy knew the poem about the man who died in the arms of Helvellyn and Catchedicam, and whose dog stayed beside him and died too.

"Would you do that, Dingo?" she said, and Dingo

wagged his tail at the sound of her voice and looked back at her as much as to say, "Come on."

But she was beginning to think that she could not go much farther: at any rate, not without another rest; and when she came to a flat stone she sat down on it. She had been wet to the skin long since, for her coat was not a thick one, so the rain did not make much difference. If it did she could not help it. By this time she was dazed. She could not even feel afraid of the men with sticks and stones who might be about on such a day as this. Her thoughts became numb, like her body, and so she sat on, miserably cold, but apathetic and more incapable every moment of further effort.

Dixon was having his tea in his cottage with his wife and Ada, who was spoiled. He told them about his encounter with Peggy, and his wife said that it was a sin and a shame. The child might catch her death of cold while he sat there eating his tea and talking of cushions. If the truth was known they probably belonged to her. She was her father's child, wasn't she? and all the money had been Mr. Twistleton's and not Jezebel's.

"S-sh!" said Dixon, looking at Ada. "Little pitchers have long ears. And why Jezebel?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Dixon. "I always think of her when I hear that chapter read. I see her sitting at the window quiet and wicked. What are you going to do about that child?"

"It's none of my business. She's home long since, I expect."

"You can ask at the house, and if she isn't run the car back before you clean it. It wouldn't take you five minutes."

"It might cost me my place if I did it without orders, and I've my own child to think of . . . and you."

Mrs. Dixon said no more. It was not necessary, because she knew her man. When he had finished his

tea he went to the mansion and asked if Miss Peggy had come in: and while he waited for an answer from the schoolroom he talked to Mrs. Butterfield, who used the very words his wife had used and said it was a sin and a shame.

"What's that Miss Busby about?" asked Dixon.

"She's nothing but a tool," said Mrs. Butterfield, and as she spoke Rose, the second housemaid, came in and said that Miss Peggy was not back yet and that Miss Busby wished to have tea taken upstairs at once.

"Isn't she put out?" asked Dixon.

"She will be if her tea is late," said Rose pertly, and went off to get it.

"I'll walk along the road to meet her," said Dixon.

"What good'll that do?" said Mrs. Butterfield.

"Give her a heart like. She's young to be trapesing the roads in this weather."

"Be a man and take the car. Can't you say you dropped a nut or something and went back for it? What's the good of having a brain if you never use it at an awkward moment?"

Dixon stroked his head, supposed he was a fool to interfere, said it was raining worse than ever, and argued that he was not dilly-dallying while the child caught her death of cold, but only making up his mind as to what he would say and do if he was given a month's notice on the spot.

"What you forget is that the cushions are new," he said. "From what I saw of Miss Peggy you might as well turn the lake on them. You can't altogether blame Mrs. Twistleton. Besides, if I do fetch the child, what am I to do with her? Put her in the hall and let her ruin the carpets as well as the cushions? Not much."

Mrs. Butterfield heaved a sigh as heavy as her person, sent the kitchen-maid for a rug, gave it to Dixon and told him to wrap Peggy in it, put her beside him and

bring her to the back door. If any questions were asked she would take the responsibility because she didn't much care whether she left or stayed. She didn't like such goings-on.

"That's a good idea," said Dixon, accepting the rug with a look of relief. "If I can keep her off the cushions. . . ."

If Mrs. Butterfield had not been a woman of self-control and particular about her language she would have said "Drat the cushions." She looked it as she almost shut the door in Dixon's face: and when she spoke to Jordan about what had happened, and was told that Miss Peggy had had nothing to eat since breakfast but apple snow, she grew angrier still.

"There are things you can bear to see and there are things you can't bear to see," she said darkly. "If Mrs. Twistleton says anything to Dixon about the car I shall speak."

"You'd only be told to go," said Jordan. "There's nothing you can get hold of. Miss Peggy's not an easy child. Why was her pinafore muddy, and why was she so late for lunch? Why didn't she come in with the others? It's not all Mrs. Twistleton."

But when, twenty minutes later, Dixon came back with Peggy in his arms and Dingo at his heels Jordan changed his note. Dixon walked straight into the hall where Mrs. Butterfield was at tea with the upper servants and put what looked like a bundle of rugs on the sofa.

"I found her lying on a heap of stones," he said. "She's alive now, but I can't say what she'll be tomorrow. She's as wet as a fish and as cold as a hail-stone. She's asleep, I think. Perhaps she isn't as bad as she looks. If you put her in a hot bath and give her a drink. . . ."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Dixon," said Mrs. Butterfield majestically. "I shall know what to do."

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. BUTTERFIELD undressed Peggy, wrapped her in a thick, soft old Shetland shawl, took her on her knee close to the fire and gave her a cup of hot milky tea. The child soon came out of her dazed state, but she shivered with cold.

"We'll have a hot bath directly," said Mrs. Butterfield, "and then we'll be popped into bed with a hot bottle."

"But I'm not ill," said Peggy. "I expect I'll have to do my lessons."

She spoke heavily and sleepily and her eyes closed as her head sank upon the cook's shoulder. She felt queer and did not understand it: but she felt comfortable. After the heap of stones and the relentless rain and the desolation of the roadside, Mrs. Butterfield's lap was a pleasant place. She began to dream and then to wake again.

"Where is Dingo?" she asked, trying to open her eyes. But they were heavy.

"He's having a hot bath in the scullery," said Mrs. Butterfield. "He'll be in directly as proud as a prince, and wanting his tea, I'll be bound."

"He has biscuits," murmured Peggy. "They are in my cupboard. What he likes is a bone."

"He shall have a bone, my lamb. Don't you trouble yourself about nothing."

Peggy dropped off again and only half waked when Mrs. Butterfield carried her upstairs. Even in the delicious hot bath that had been got ready for her she felt stupid and drowsy: but she was not in it long. The towel that the cook dried her with was hot and so was

her bed when she was carried there. Yet she still felt those odd shivers across her back, while her head ached and her hands were hot.

"Does Miss Busby know that I've gone to bed?" she said.

"I'm going to tell her now," said the cook. "You go to sleep."

Mrs. Butterfield went into the schoolroom, where she found Miss Busby trying to crochet a pink jumper from one of Weldon's pattern books, while Mabel made a hash of the Wedding March from Lohengrin on the piano. The Wedding March stopped in the middle at the unexpected irruption of the cook into the schoolroom, and Miss Busby looked up in amazement, but immediately looked down again at her pattern book.

"'Commence with one hundred and seventeen chain and work ten rows of border.' One moment, Mrs. Butterfield. This is so difficult. Can you crochet? I've never tried a jumper before, and if I go wrong. . . ."

"You've finished your tea, I see," said Mrs. Butterfield, for the table was clear.

"Long since," said Mabel, who had twirled round on the music-stool. "It's nearly six o'clock."

"The front being wider than the back will contain more groups of treble.'"

"What about Miss Peggy?"

"She hasn't come in yet," said Mabel. "Isn't she the limit?"

"She had no lunch."

"She'll have no tea either, I'm afraid," said Mabel. "It's her own doing. She should have kept up with us."

"She is three years younger than you, miss, and not strong at that . . . and had had no meat since breakfast . . . for I don't call apple snow meat."

"More do I," said Mabel with a giggle.

"'Miss one treble, three treble,'" murmured Miss

Busby, and then raising her head and addressing Mrs. Butterfield in a tone intended to convey reproof, she said:

"Mrs. Twistleton will not allow Miss Peggy to have any meal that she misses through her own misconduct. That is her rule. Miss Peggy must learn to be punctual and obedient."

The cook still stood in the doorway, a corpulent figure, illiterate, and dressed in her working clothes, yet, by reason of her nature, having more dignity than the foolish young woman presiding in the schoolroom. She owned to Jordan when she got downstairs that she would have liked to snatch the crochet work from Miss Busby's hands and shake her, but she showed no sign of such elemental impulses in her speech or manner.

"I have given Miss Peggy some tea and a hot bath and put her to bed," she said.

Miss Busby's ideas were not easily detached from her own affairs, and at the moment the pink jumper was her affair; but she stared at the cook in surprise.

"What very odd behavior!" she said. "Miss Peggy's place is in the schoolroom."

"Yes, I know as it's your place to look after Miss Peggy," said the cook blandly, "but I really couldn't bring her up here, the state she was in . . . it wasn't fit. She's asleep now, and I'm going to ask Mrs. Twistleton to 'phone for the doctor."

"Whatever for?" cried Mabel.

"Is she ill?" said Miss Busby skeptically.

"She's goin' to be, if I know anything about children," said the cook, and closed the door after her.

Miss Busby felt disturbed and annoyed. Before she settled down to her jumper again she went to Peggy's little room, opened the door and looked in. Mabel went with her.

"Hullo, Peggy!" said Mabel.

"Well, Peggy!" said Miss Busby.

But Peggy took no notice of them although her eyes were not quite shut. She had a high color by this time, and her breathing was quick and labored.

"She doesn't seem quite right," said Miss Busby. "I daresay she wants a night's rest."

So she went back to her jumper, helped Mabel to bed at the proper time, ate a hearty supper brought upstairs by the housemaid, and went to bed at ten o'clock without looking at Peggy again. She had rather expected to see Mrs. Twistleton and to be hauled over the coals for having left Peggy behind in the rain. With regard to Peggy, there was never any knowing what would please Mrs. Twistleton or what would displease her. While Mr. Twistleton lived there had sometimes been an explosion on his part on the child's behalf that resulted in some new clothes or the remission of punishment. He it was who had given orders that Dingo should not be killed after Mr. Gerard had brought Peggy home. But now he was dead and Mr. Gerard was away in Manchester. Miss Busby supposed that Peggy was in for a bad time. Luckily, children were tough and insensitive. They did not suffer as their elders did: and Peggy brought her troubles on herself. If she had been more like Mabel her step-mother might have suffered her more gladly. But Mrs. Twistleton was an odd woman. She actually seemed to enjoy the spectacle of pain and the infliction of it. The idea was not pleasant, so Miss Busby would not dwell on it. She was comfortable herself at Beda Close, and wherever you live as a hireling you must take the rough with the smooth and shut your eyes. If she tried to interfere on Peggy's behalf she would be dismissed, and so injure herself without benefiting Peggy.

Mrs. Butterfield had not been able to see Mrs. Twistleton. She had received a message to say that this was

impossible to-night as Mrs. Twistleton was tired. She had sent another message about Peggy and a doctor, and had received one back through Jordan that virtually told her to mind her own business. As her urgent business by that time was Mrs. Twistleton's dinner she had to go about it: and as, after all, she knew next to nothing of illness, she did this, with a satisfied mind. She had done her best for the child, who might be better by to-morrow and could have the doctor if she was worse. She was not surprised to hear that Mrs. Twistleton had not gone near Peggy, and had listened with a stony face to Jordan's story and had made no comment on it, but had sent a message about a Dutch sauce that was not to be quite as thick to-night as it had been a night or two ago. When Jordan asked whether he should 'phone for the doctor Mrs. Twistleton had said, "Certainly not."

"I know her," said Mrs. Butterfield, who was very angry about the Dutch sauce. "Sits there like a basilisk and glares at you."

"What is a basilisk?" asked the kitchen-maid, who was chopping capers for the sauce.

"Something that glares," said Mrs. Butterfield. "You get those capers as fine as pepper, my girl, and never mind what Mr. Jordan and I are conversing about."

But when the dinner had been sent up Mrs. Butterfield, tired as she was, went to look at Peggy: and she came downstairs again saying she didn't like the look of her or the sound of her: and that she would clap a poultice on the child's chest before she went to bed.

"It's taking a good deal on yourself," said Jordan.

"Not more than I can bear," said the cook.

She was cross and tired next morning though because she had spent the whole night in Peggy's room, and said as much when Mrs. Twistleton came downstairs to give orders.

"I haven't seen Miss Peggy yet," said Mrs. Twistleton indifferently. "Is her cold worse?"

The cook felt like glaring then, but her manner was outwardly deferential.

"I think it is inflammation of the lungs, m'm," she said. "She will probably die if she is neglected much longer."

A tremor passed over Mrs. Twistleton's face that the cook, watching her, perceived and appreciated. "I've frightened her," she thought to herself: and went on to ask whether she should make some beef-tea in case it was wanted.

"The first thing to do is to 'phone for the doctor," said Mrs. Twistleton sharply. "Why was I not told before that Miss Peggy was really ill? Oh, yes, I got some message about her being out in the rain, but nothing to alarm me. It is a pity there is no one in the house with a little common sense."

That was the way she talked to Miss Busby too, and to the doctor when he came, and to the nurses. Yes! there were two nurses in the house by next day, and one of them told Miss Busby that if the little girl lived it would be a miracle. But the impudence of it! said Mrs. Butterfield to Jordan and Dixon. After all that had happened, to turn on them. As if she could take them in! They knew what had happened right enough, and next time Mr. Gerard came to the house Mrs. Butterfield would have a word with him. Indeed, if Mr. Jordan could give her the gentleman's address she would not wait for him to come. She would write to him.

The letter was posted on a Thursday, and on Friday Mrs. Twistleton received a telegram from Victor to say that he was coming over on business next day. She ordered a room to be got ready for him and went to meet him at Senwick in the car. She did some shopping first so that he could not suppose that she had gone in on

purpose to meet him: but she did not explain this. She never embroiled herself in explanations, but left circumstances to explain themselves, which they usually did, in her favor. She looked handsome and many years less than her age, as she waited in the car: for she did not wear widow's weeds. She wore black furs that were becoming and a fur hat made for her by a Frenchwoman in London who knew just what size and what lines enhanced her looks to the utmost. She had reddened her lips and powdered her face and she wore a veil. She liked the prospect of entertaining Victor now that she was by herself and free. He had not shown himself susceptible yet, but perhaps he would before long. A man who had knocked about the world as he had done must have had experiences and be ready for adventure. He would want to talk business, she supposed, but she did not know what there could be new to say. She had not expected him to come again so soon. Perhaps he had made an excuse to come.

There he was: the first to get out of the station and carrying his suit-case himself. Quick and energetic in his walk, young, cheerful: a contrast in every way to the dull, dyspeptic old man she had endured for the last five years. It was with a sense of agreeable expectation that she greeted him and made room for him beside her.

"Everything all right?" he said, as they moved off.

"Yes," she answered. "Did you have a pleasant journey?"

"Quite. How is Peggy?"

"Oh! Peggy . . . your ward, of course. How correct of you to ask after her! I'm sorry to say she is ill."

"What's the matter?"

"Pneumonia."

"How did she get it?"

"How do people get pneumonia? She was out in

the rain: but she had been out in the rain a thousand times and come to no harm. I have two nurses for her. Dr. Jones advised it. They have spread themselves over the whole wing. I detest nurses. But I took Mabel and Miss Busby away because some people think pneumonia is infectious. I don't much believe in it, but one can't be too careful. You are not afraid of it, are you?"

"Not in the least," said Victor. "Is Peggy very bad?"

"She was yesterday. I've not seen her to-day."

Mrs. Twistleton felt discontented and displeased. The occasion was not taking on the character she had anticipated: one of friendly intimacy, flattering to herself.

The young man had a way of speaking that was sharp and decisive: like his glance and his profile. It was very well when he addressed other people, but she felt the edge of it uncomfortably to-day. Besides, he seemed to be more interested in Peggy than in her, which was absurd.

"I'll run up and see her," he said directly he arrived, and without asking her permission.

To be sure he was Peggy's guardian, but that did not make things any better. She hoped he was not going to give trouble.

CHAPTER XIV

POOOR Peggy! She lay there gasping for breath, seeing people come and go like shadows, ridden by bad dreams, stabbed by pain. The night and the day before the nurses arrived were still heavy on her mind, haunting it. Once in the night her step-mother had come in silently, had looked at her fixedly and gone out again. Mrs. Butterfield had fallen asleep in her chair and had heard nothing: nor would she believe that Peggy had seen what she had seen. But Peggy knew. Then day came, bringing still worse pain. That had been a time of torment. Mrs. Butterfield was busy downstairs and no one had come near her except her step-mother, who first brought the doctor and then put on a poultice, scalding hot. Peggy had tried to scream, but could only groan. She could not remember much after that. Perhaps she had gone to sleep. She was always hot and thirsty, but there was nothing to drink. Her bed was untidy and uncomfortable, but there was no one to make it. After a long time she waked and saw the nurses looking at her. They were kind and knew how thirsty she was and gave her drinks. They made her bed comfortable and washed her all over, so that she felt cooler, and they let the fresh air come in at the window. She heard the rain outside and it sent her to sleep. Whenever she waked by day or by night one of the nurses was there and did pleasant little things that made her feel better. They did not talk much: but once when she heard talking she opened her eyes and saw Mr. Gerard: not a dream of him, but the real man, who took her hot hand in his cool one and asked her what she had been doing to herself. She meant to answer him, but

she must have fallen asleep without meaning to, for when she opened her eyes again he had gone. She did not mind as much as she would have done if she had been well. She was too weak and sleepy to mind anything except her physical sensations and sometimes her dreams.

Victor had gone downstairs, anxious, but yet relieved. Peggy was very ill, but she was being well nursed, and the nurse on duty had told him that she had good hope of the child's recovery. He found Mrs. Twistleton sitting by the fire, and she reminded him more than ever of a large soft cat that blinks and watches and waits. She was in black, but when she wore black you did not associate it with mourning. Her throat and arms were creamy. The tapestried chair in which she sat made a gorgeous background for her ripe charms, and on a table at her elbow there was a bowl with orchids as exotic-looking as she was herself. She had a book in her hand when Victor went in, but put it down and waited for him to speak. He did not sit down at first.

"She is pretty bad," he said. "Poor little thing!"

"I thought she was better to-night," said Mrs. Twistleton. She did not actually yawn, but she managed to look bored without yawning.

"Have you seen her since you got back?"

"No."

She might have done so, for Victor had dressed after he had seen Peggy and before he came downstairs. Even-
ing clothes suited him. Rhoda was thinking so, as she watched his profile at times when he was frowning or absorbed. She admired hardness in men. The two she had married had both been wax in her hands and she had wearied of them. This man was younger than she was, but he was not young for his age. He had not lived in cotton wool, keeping himself soft. She hoped he would not want to talk of Peggy all the evening.

"How did she get the chill?" he asked. He had had

a long rambling letter from Mrs. Butterfield telling him what had occurred, but he could not give her away: and he was curious to hear Mrs. Twistleton's account. However, she did not seem willing to give one.

"I told you," she said with a touch of impatience. "It rained and Peggy was out in it. She isn't the only child in the world who ever got wet through and suffered for it."

"I suppose not," said Victor, "but we must take care that it doesn't happen again. Are you satisfied with Miss Busby?"

"I don't propose to send her away."

It was difficult. Victor could not lay down the law for Mrs. Twistleton in her own house and he could not remove Peggy without good reason. He managed to see Mrs. Butterfield before he left and told her to write to him whenever she thought it necessary: and when Peggy turned the corner he went over again and arranged that one of the nurses should take her to Grange-over-Sands as soon as she could travel. Mrs. Twistleton thought this unnecessary and said so: but he had his way. Moreover, when he went up to see Peggy he saw the nurse too, and asked her if the child had plenty of warm clothes. "What a thoughtful young man he is," said the nurse to herself, and told him that Peggy had nothing warm to wear at all.

"How is that?" he said to Peggy, who was on his knee, looking all eyes and colorless. Her hair had been cut close while she was ill and little red-gold curls were beginning to cover her head.

"She hasn't even a dressing-gown," continued the nurse. "I spoke to Mrs. Twistleton about it but nothing has been done."

"Give me a list of what you want and measurements," said Victor shortly. He was angry, and he looked it. "Not a young man I should like to cross," thought the

nurse, and she began to make the list at once, while Peggy leaned her head on Victor's shoulder and listened to his story of the bear that came to the rubbish-heap near the hotel and got its paw imprisoned in a treacle-tin.

"When I go to Grange will you come to see me?" she said, directly the story was finished.

"Why should I? You know I don't like children."

"Don't you like me?"

"Not much."

"I believe you do . . . a little. Can I take Dingo to Grange? What is nurse doing? Why is she measuring my arms and legs and my neck?"

"You'll see before long," said Victor, and directly he got back to Manchester he put the case before his married sister and took her with him to the shops she recommended. About a week later the nurse received a letter from him with a key in it, and two days before they were to start for Grange the carrier from Senwick left a neat trunk at the house with Peggy's initials painted on it. Mrs. Butterfield happened to be about when it arrived and had it sent up to Peggy's room. The nurse had told her that it was coming.

"Your trunk has come," said the nurse, putting her head into the schoolroom where, for the first time since her illness, Peggy sat by the fire with Miss Busby and Mabel.

"Do you want to see it unpacked?"

Of course she did: and so did Miss Busby and Mabel. There was not much room for them all in Peggy's small bedroom, but they squeezed in somehow, and then Mabel asked Peggy if she had known that the trunk was coming. Peggy said she had not known: but she supposed that Mr. Gerard had sent it.

"How odd of him!" said Mabel. "I wonder if Mother knows about it. I wonder what he has sent. Oh! Oh!

Peggy! I wish I'd been ill. I wish Mr. Gerard was my guardian. I do wonder what Mother will do about it though. She likes us to be plainly dressed."

From the top till of the trunk the nurse had taken out a long fur coat and a blue quilted silk dressing-gown, both Peggy's size. Then there was a warm traveling-rug, and in a corner a fur cap to match the coat and a pair of fur gloves. Underneath the till there were sets of warm underclothing and stockings all marked with Peggy's name: and at the very bottom of the trunk there were books and two or three games and a big box of chocolates. Mabel began on the chocolates at once, but the nurse took them from her.

"Everything is to go to Grange," she said; "Mr. Gerard says so in his letter."

"Mr. Gerard isn't master of the house," said Mabel pertly, and as soon as she could run downstairs to tell her mother of what had happened.

"It isn't Mr. Gerard's business to buy Peggy's clothes, is it?" she said.

"He evidently thinks it is."

"I call it officious, don't you? Besides, Peggy can't go about in a fur coat unless I have one too, can she? I should like one."

"You won't get one," said Mrs. Twistleton. "I don't like fur coats for children."

"Shall you let Peggy wear this one?"

Mrs. Twistleton did not answer, but got rid of Mabel as soon as she could. She was annoyed, but kept her annoyance to herself for the present. While her husband had lived he had given her an allowance for the children's clothes and she had spent it nearly all on Mabel and herself. He gave her a great deal for herself but it had never been enough. There was hardly a limit to what she could spend on her own luxuries. Mr. Twistleton had sometimes complained that Peggy went

badly shod or shabby, but it had been easy to throw sand in his eyes. Victor Gerard was not going to be so easy. Besides, he had control of Peggy's large fortune. Peggy's large fortune! The thought was insufferable.

Peggy stayed at Grange till just before Christmas and got fat and rosy there. Victor hardly knew her when he went to see her. She had grown much taller, her face had filled out, and her copper-colored hair was thick and curly again. Two long, slim, black legs beneath a skirt several inches too short danced beside him from the station up to the hotel, and two eyes, bright with health and youth, smiled at him. He felt pleased with himself. This was his doing. He had not wanted to be any child's guardian, but when he undertook a job it was his way to do it well: at least, as well as he could. His ward was a credit to him—except as regards the shortness of her skirts, which he told her at once was scandalous.

"Nurse did let down the hem and put in a false one. She couldn't do more," said Peggy. "She says I ought to have two new frocks. I have grown so fast that mine are too tight and too short for me. But I daresay I shall get thin again when I go home. Oh dear!"

"What's the matter, Peggy?"

"I don't want to go home ever again. Why must I go?"

"Don't you want to see Mabel?"

"Not particularly."

"And the tarn and the lake and Mrs. Butterfield?"

"Mrs. Butterfield has gone."

"Who told you so?"

"Mabel told me in a letter. I cried."

"Did she write to you?"

"Who? Mabel?"

"No. Mrs. Butterfield."

Peggy shook her head. "I asked her to when I bid her good-by, but she said she didn't like her letters going

about. She would be laughed at because she had had no education, except in cooking."

Victor felt startled and displeased. If Mrs. Butterfield had gone, Peggy had lost her only friend in the house: for he judged the other servants to be occupied with their own affairs and indifferent to her. He wondered what had happened, and was surprised that Mrs. Butterfield had not written to tell him. But a week later he had a letter from her in which she explained what had happened. It all came, she said, through a little pitcher who had long ears and grown-up people who ought to have known better than to talk in front of her.

"Miss Peggy being away, Miss Mabel took to playing with that Ada Dixon, which never should have been allowed. They were always about together in the garden till they fell out, and then the fat was in the fire as the saying is. Miss Mabel tells Ada her father is only a servant, not being what I call a well-mannered child, really any more than her mother . . . as different from Miss Peggy's mother as chalk from cheese. I don't blame Ada either for sticking up for her father. But she should not have rolled Miss Mabel in the road and then sat on her and shouted 'Jezebel!' at her, so that the neighbors came out of their cottages to hear. Jezebel wasn't the end of it neither. She must out with the whole story about her father going back for Miss Peggy, as we know he did, and about my writing to you. How she got hold of that I do not know, but Dixon posts all the letters and I presume took notice, and, like a silly man, told his wife. I was asked about the affair next day and kept my temper, which is more than I can say for her. She was put out and said something about spies in the house and gentlemen not being gentlemen who talked to cooks. I said in that case I had better go, and she said, 'By all means, and Dixon is going

too' . . . all through that Ada. However, as I tell him, there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and if she refuses me a character I shall apply to Mr. Twistleton's sister, who never liked her and has known me twenty years. I'm sorry not to see Miss Peggy again, as I held her in my arms when she was born. Pity you haven't a house of your own. This is no place for her: so no more at present from yours obediently,

"ELIZABETH BUTTERFIELD."

Peggy was back at Beda Close when Victor received this letter, and it only wanted a week to Christmas. He thought he would run over in the New Year and see how she was getting on. No doubt he would have done if the gods had not intervened with an urgent summons from Australia that caused him to leave Manchester at once.

CHAPTER XV

THE winter lingered and the spring came, and still Peggy flagged. She looked thin and hollow-eyed again, took cold easily and set up a cough that annoyed Mrs. Twistleton. If it came on at lunch she was sent out of the room, and before long it came on at lunch regularly because she was afraid it would. There was no Mrs. Butterfield in the kitchen now, but a new woman who disliked Dingo because he had once stolen a kidney waiting on an open dish in the kitchen fender. She disliked Peggy too, because in her haste to defend Dingo the child had said the dish should not have been on the fender: which was true and offensive. So Peggy had nowhere to go now when she was hungry, and had to wait till tea-time for bread-and-butter. Under these conditions the winter walks were so tiring that when she got back she could not eat much. She wanted to lie down and rest, but this was not allowed after Mrs. Twistleton found her on the sofa at tea-time, and said she would not have such lazy ways. She had begun her cold baths again directly after Christmas, but she never got used to them or felt warm after them. They were a form of torture that she dreaded as she dreaded other things in the daily round: the fits of coughing that left her exhausted, the mockery of lunch, the lessons that stupefied her, and the walks in snow and bitter winds. The new frocks the nurse had recommended had never been bought, and she was not allowed to wear her fur coat because Mrs. Twistleton said it looked ridiculous on a child of her age. Peggy did not dare to answer that she did not mind being ridiculous if only she could

be warm. She was supposed to get warm with exercise, she knew, and so she might have done formerly by running races with Dingo. But nowadays when she tried to run she began to cough and got hot with coughing, and after that shivering cold. She was unpopular everywhere because of the noise she made with her cough, and that was disconcerting. It gave Miss Busby a headache and worried Mabel while she did her sums. Dingo was the only one who never seemed to mind, even if it shook him when he was in her lap. She was not supposed to have him in her lap because he left white hairs on her black frock, but sometimes she spread a towel for him and let him come. She had endless talks with him, taking both parts in different voices, and her heart was full of love for him in these days when there was no one else to love. The shape of his head gave her pleasure, and so did the expression of his eyes, his velvety ears and his polite tail that would wag even when he was sleepy if he thought she wanted it to wag. No one knew it, but every night when the house was asleep he got out of his basket which was in the corridor and gave a little scratch at Peggy's door. She always heard it and let him in very softly. He spent the rest of the night snuggled under the bedclothes and went back to his basket in the morning when the housemaid came in. She was a good-natured girl and did not tell tales: and he was so clever that he knew he must be in his basket in the early morning. It was deceitful, Peggy knew, and next time she saw Mr. Gerard she meant to ask him if it mattered. The difficulty would be to explain to Dingo if Mr. Gerard said that it did matter, and must not go on. But there would be some way out, and Mr. Gerard would find it: if ever he came again. Peggy had written to him twice but he had not answered. She hoped he had not gone to heaven. She did not ask. She never spoke to her step-mother unless she was spoken to. But

one cold afternoon in May Mrs. Twistleton found her in the hall putting a letter into the plate where it was usual to put letters for the post.

"What are you doing here?" she said.

Peggy held out the third letter she had just written to Victor. Mrs. Twistleton laughed unpleasantly.

"He won't get it," she said.

Peggy stared and did not speak. All her spirit and all her ideas seemed to desert her in her step-mother's presence, so that she stood there stupefied and sulky.

"Don't you know that he has gone to Australia?"

Peggy felt a queer little pain in her heart, and did not know that she turned as white as a sheet. She wanted to ask whether he would ever come back, but the words died on her lips. She accepted the bad news as a child of her age accepts the inevitable, with despair and without understanding. There was no one but Dingo now. Mr. Gerard had left her.

"I wonder what you write about?" said Mrs. Twistleton, and in the child's presence she took the letter out of the envelope. When she had read it she tore it across and threw it into a waste-paper basket.

"What a little viper you are!" she cried, seizing the child and shaking her fiercely. "Pretending to be ill when there is nothing whatever the matter with you! Go upstairs and stay there. Whine with the dog if you want to whine. You won't see Mr. Gerard again."

Peggy, dazed and violently shaken, began to cough. She tried desperately, to stop, and suffocated with the effort. Her step-mother gave her a push towards the stairs, and she fell at the foot of the flight in the hall, choked and gasping. Mrs. Twistleton went back into her own room and shut the door. She was furiously angry. Peggy's letter had been childish and impersonal, but every line of it showed that she was unhappy. At Grange she had been happy, and she asked Mr. Gerard

to let her go back there. She told him that she loved him and wanted to see him. She loved Dingo too, she said, but Dingo could not talk or laugh. Besides, her frocks were shorter than ever, and her legs were always cold and she wanted new ones . . . frocks, not legs. She was his loving Peggy, and she begged and prayed him to come soon or at any rate to write to her. P.S.—The new cook did not like Dingo and Peggy did not like her: so she never went into the kitchen now when she was hungry.

The postscript made Rhoda angrier than the rest of the letter. It suggested the truth: that Peggy was being deliberately underfed, and the last thing Rhoda desired was to have the truth publicly known. She would not admit, even to herself, that she acted on any system or harbored any definite design against the child. She held her in aversion, partly because she was sensible that Peggy detested her. They reacted on each other evilly and cruelly: the child as terrified of the woman as a small bird is of a serpent: and the woman herself hardly able to keep her hands off a creature wholly in her power and yet shrewd enough to take her measure. There were moments when she knew that she ought to let the child go: that it would have been better for herself to succumb to drink or drugs than to the impulses of which Peggy was the victim. But she believed that she could keep within bounds, or at any rate within the letter of the law. Appearances were often in her favor. Peggy was a troublesome child, requiring discipline. There was room for a considerable difference of opinion as to the best way of treating difficult children. Her cough was troublesome, too. Mabel and Miss Busby both complained of it, and had been told to send Peggy out of the room when it came on. Everyone was being told that the family was going abroad this spring, partly for Peggy's sake. A warm place on the Riviera would

soon set her right, the doctor had said. But Rhoda did not intend to go to the Riviera. There had been considerable delay in securing a tenant on a five years' lease for the large, expensive house: so that it would be early in June before they got away. Mrs. Twistleton had not made up her itinerary yet. She wanted to see the Italian towns. It annoyed her to hear other people talk of them while she had not been to them. Besides, Peggy's mother lived in Italy and they might easily come across each other. She dwelt on the idea and wondered what Daphne looked like now and whether she ever thought of her child.

Peggy had picked herself up and gone back to the schoolroom sick at heart and ill. One thought was uppermost in her mind. She would never see Mr. Gerard again, and he had gone without writing to her or bidding her good-by. It must be true because he had not written. They were all going away too before long, and he would not know what had become of her. They were going to Italy. Miss Busby said so, and she harped on Peggy's luck and the gratitude she ought to feel. Whenever she did not get on well with her lessons she was told that she did not deserve to go to Italy, and when she coughed she was reminded that she must not make a noise like that in trains and hotels. Miss Busby had finished her pink jumper and was beginning a new blue one. She was having a serge coat and skirt made in Manchester and a new cotton frock in Senwick. Mabel was excited about her clothes too, and was going out of mourning. So the black things she had worn all the winter were to be tidied up and altered for Peggy. In the schoolroom after lessons nothing was talked of now but clothes and Italy: and Miss Busby was trying to teach herself a little Italian, because, she said, it might come in useful if they were suddenly surrounded by bandits.

"What are bandits?" asked Peggy.

"Robbers with long mustaches and short cloaks: and with knives and revolvers stuck in their belts. They seize you when you are out for a walk and keep you in a mountain fastness till your friends pay a ransom."

"What happens if you have no friends?"

"They kill you."

Peggy did not feel as much frightened as she would have done formerly by such a picture: chiefly because her vitality was at a lower ebb. When your head aches and your cough hurts you and leaves you bruised and weak you do not care what happens in a mountain fastness in a foreign land, even if you yourself are soon going there. You are absorbed by your bodily sensations and dully miserable. Besides, it was possible that bandits were not as black as they were painted. They might turn out like Robin Hood. As long as they did not kill Dingo . . . a new unbearable idea swept every other from Peggy's mind.

"Shall I be able to take Dingo to Italy?" she asked.

Miss Busby and Mabel both laughed at her. How silly she was! Mrs. Twistleton would not have the dog in the same room with her. Was it likely that she would be burdened with him on a journey? Besides, dogs were not easily conveyed from one country to another. There were questions of quarantine. Miss Busby could tell Peggy what the word meant but not how it was enforced in the current year. It did not matter. She might be sure that, irrespective of quarantine, Dingo would be left behind.

"Could I be left behind?" said Peggy.

"Not if you are good," said Miss Busby perfunctorily. She was thinking about the blue jumper and wondering whether she should start a green one when it was finished. She might take some wool with her. She had never traveled and did not know what hotel life would be like. Would she have time on her hands, or would she "mix

in society" more than she did at Beda Close, where she was comfortable but lonely? Even if she only found another governess to make friends with it would be cheering: and there might be various people . . . men as well as women, on expeditions and in gardens and galleries . . . opportunities, in short, that were denied to her at home. No doubt Mrs. Twistleton would be exacting and inconsiderate, but. . . . She did not know exactly where they were going. Mrs. Twistleton, who hardly ever spoke to her except to give orders, had not told her. The journey presented itself to her mind vaguely as a continental trip, an experience of varying values. Even if she did not enjoy it much she could talk about it, and probably she would enjoy some things. She wished that Peggy could have been left behind. It had been comfortable in the schoolroom while Peggy was ill and away. She did not dislike the child, but she disliked the wear and tear of her cough. Besides, it was unpleasant to see her treated badly and impossible to interfere. If she had tried to interfere she would have been sent away, like Mrs. Butterfield, and that had done Peggy no good. Mabel had told Miss Busby everything that Ada Dixon had said, and it showed what the servants in the house and out of it were saying to each other. Perhaps that was why Mrs. Twistleton had decided to let the house and go abroad. She would not want a scandal. Miss Busby hoped that the publicity of life when traveling would act as a check: but she did not feel certain. Besides, Peggy was often to blame. Indeed, it seemed as if a very devil of naughtiness possessed the child for the next week or two. She did everything that she ought not to have done and nothing that was expected of her. She did heinous things so that Mabel looked on amazed and Miss Busby scolded till she was hoarse. Her lessons were never prepared, her hair was never tidy. She chattered when she should

have been silent, she banged doors, she was pert. One day she put out her tongue at Miss Busby. She was impishly rude to Mabel and, as if she asked for punishment, upset the ink over one of her step-sister's new frocks. The punishment was administered, as she might have known it would be, by Mrs. Twistleton herself. When it was over she tore through the schoolroom like a fury, with two pink patches on her cheeks, her eyes heavy with tears, and coughing as she ran. She wore neither a hat nor a coat, but she called to Dingo and he followed her. Mabel tried to intercept her and received a shove that would have upset her if she had been less solid. Miss Busby wondered what was going to happen next and went to the window to see. An incoherent exclamation of amazement and dismay soon called Mabel to her side.

"She is like a mad thing," said Miss Busby helplessly. "What is to be done?"

For, just as if Peggy really had gone mad for the moment, she was dancing round a bed of tulips and inciting Dingo to tear through them. Their brittle stalks and broad leaves lay in ruin in his wake, and still Peggy capered and called to him. They could hear her as well as see her, for Miss Busby had thrown open a window and was trying to attract her attention. But while she did so a shot from a rifle startled her. She looked at Mabel and Mabel looked at her. They both felt sick. Dingo was only a dog, but to have him killed before their eyes! Besides, he was not quite dead. He wriggled. And then Peggy screamed. It was horrible.

PART II

OUTLAW

CHAPTER XVI

DAPHNE had put off her mourning. The heat had come to Siena suddenly this spring and she startled Andrea Sarzoni by coming into the room in a blue dress, the blue of the Virgin, but diaphanous and uncovering her lovely throat. Never, never would he forget that moment. He could not speak at first, but gazed at her with rapt eyes, as if she was music. He had always seen her in black, and had associated her with sorrow. She was alone, she was quiet, and the expression of her face was set in sadness because she had lost her husband and her child. So much he had known about her for a long time, and the other things he knew had grown into his consciousness gradually as he gave her lessons. She loved music, and when she was playing or listening she forgot everything except the exquisite joy of harmonies. She had a low, penetrating voice that pleased his critical ear, and she had a nature as beautiful as her incomparably beautiful face. Her beauties, both bodily and spiritual, stole upon a man unawares. They were not for the market-place. He could imagine that the crowd would pass them by. But he drank them in as a sick man drinks in sunshine and without any hope of return; he worshiped her. She did not know it. At least, she did not know that she had become the passion and the consolation of his life: one with his music, which, before she came, had been

his all. For he had neither wife nor child, nor worldly goods nor many friends.

Daphne had been a widow for nearly five years now. Her second marriage had not lasted long. When she left Manchester with Major Coverdale he had taken her straight to Italy, had made her his wife as soon as the law allowed and had loved her to the end. But the end had come quickly. When war broke out he was recalled at once, and died gallantly at Ypres breathing her name as he died. She got the news of his death in Rome and stayed on there, partly from the inertia that sometimes accompanies grief, and partly because she did not know where else to go. She found that Major Coverdale had left her everything he had and that she would have enough and to spare in future. At first, the lawyers' letters explaining her position amazed and troubled her. She had never owned and handled money: she had never been an independent woman, and as she had been attached to the dead man it distressed her to stand in his shoes. Then, when Italy entered into the war, she found work to do and opportunities of using money that made her thankful to possess it. She had spared neither her strength nor her resources, and when peace came she felt worn out and old. Rome tired her. England did not call her yet. Almost by chance she drifted to Siena and stayed on there because it gave her rest. She took a small flat, furnished it simply, and expected to run out her days there: for she had forgotten that she was young. She made one or two friends, but not many. The everlasting procession of English and American tourists passing through Siena never got to know her. She shrank from her countryfolk and from her kinsmen across the seas because her own history weighed on her mind. She could never tell which of them would shrink from her when they knew that she was a divorced wife and the mother of a child she might not see. Soon after

her flight from Manchester, and before her second marriage, she had had encounters that still scarred her memory. So she lived apart with her music and her books, mourning for her lover and her child. The expression of her face was wistful, as if she was seeking and could not find. Her mouth had appeal in its gentle lines. "She is like my Madonna," thought Andrea, "my own Madonna, who is the most beautiful Madonna in the world: but she would not look so sad if she could carry her child in her arms."

He forgot that ten years had passed since Daphne's child had been born, and when he thought of her sorrow he pictured her with the baby girl she had told him of and described. She had never spoken of Peggy to anyone else because it would have been impossible to do so without telling her own story. But one day she had met Andrea in the gallery—that was the home of his Madonna—and they had looked at her together for a long time. Then with the simplicity of statement and allusion that was natural to him he had said to Daphne:

"You would look down at your child as she does. You are like her. But you have no child."

And Daphne answered him, "I have a child."

The trouble in her voice and eyes had warned him that he was on difficult ground and he had said no more. But one day when they were sitting together after a lesson she had told him why she was separated from her child and how badly she wanted her.

"When people die you cannot trouble about them," she said. "It is not in your hands. You grieve, but you believe it is well. But a child . . . a little living child . . . how am I to know that she is well and happy . . . that she is brought up as she should be? Besides, I want her . . . I want her more than anything in the world. I dream that her arms are round my neck. She used to sit in my lap and I sang her to sleep. Every

night I used to bathe her myself. There were dear little creases in her arms and legs and her hair shone like copper. If I thought I could see her I would go to England and wait in the road till she passed by. Sometimes I think I will. Perhaps she has forgotten me. But if I could only see her. . . .”

So, henceforward, Andrea knew why Daphne was sad and lonely, although she possessed so much that the world prizes: and as their friendship grew he came to understand more and more about the simplicity and tenderness of her nature and to wish that some sudden turn of fate would give her back her child. He was not a fortunate man himself from the outside point of view. He earned his bread by giving lessons, and it was hardly earned: for his temper was quick and most of his pupils incapable. He was grotesque to look at: undersized and with one shoulder higher than the other. His eyes were sorrowful and kind when he was not playing: eyes you often see in Tuscan faces. But when he took up his violin they became rapt. You knew then that he was too happy in his music to be reckoned an unhappy man: and that in spite of his poverty he must have the force of character that inspires work and grows with it. For no one could play as he did who had not worked: and no weakling work steadily. Do not, therefore, see him as a sentimental creature, dissolving in a hopeless passion: soft and tiresome. It was the manhood in him that was stirred by Daphne. He fumed and fretted because he could not get her the moon if she wanted it: and came to such a pass for her sake that he began to ask himself why in the world he sat here doing nothing.

When she came into the room in her blue dress his heart leapt against his side and at first he did not speak. She was as beautiful as a flower, and she looked happier than usual to-day because the summer had come, and because, at last, she had put off her mourning. She

came in with a little hurry of movement that he had not often seen in her: and when she smiled he could imagine what her April face must have been before shame and sorrow clouded it. She sat down at once to the piano and they began to play. If her playing did not please him he stopped her and they took the passage over and over again. This happened several times to-day with the first movement of the Kreutzer Sonata, which she had practiced by herself but not with him. He was incomparably the finer musician of the two, but she had sympathy and patience. She was never slovenly or facile, and he knew that music stirred her to the depths. So he was never tired of playing with her, and the lesson always prolonged itself far beyond its supposed limit of an hour. On this account he gave her the last lesson in the day, when he was not obliged to go on to other pupils, and so, lately, she had often asked him to stay and dine with her. When he did this they played again after dinner and late into the night. She spoke Italian fluently and well, and they had long talks when they were not playing: talks about music and musicians, about the books she read or sometimes more intimate talks about themselves. He had never been so happy or so much at ease in his life as in her company. Her dainty surroundings gave him pleasure and, as he was very human, so did her dinners, which had the excellence that seems simple and is costly. At least, everything she had was costly compared with what he could buy in these hard times. A roast chicken and that curious sauce made of bread that the English like and that she had taught her cook how to make: and with the chicken, peas and new potatoes: and before the chicken asparagus, and after it great juicy cherries: and a flask of good Chianti! He did not keep house but he knew what such things cost. She gave him a cup of strong black coffee after his dinner, too, though she did not drink it herself and said it was

bad for him: and a little glass of Benedictine because he had once said that he liked it. A woman who had two sides to her: one, with music, in the skies: and one on earth, liking to pet people and give them the little earthly comforts that affect the body and, by way of the body, the soul. She should have been the mother of children. She should be restored to her child.

This evening, after dinner, they sat out for a time in the little garden that belonged to her flat and was high above the street. For, as Siena is built on three steep hills, you find these little gardens at various heights, and you can look up at them from the parched stony ways in which you walk below. Daphne's garden had a big cherry-tree in it, heavy with fruit; a lemon and a fig against a wall; a pear-tree that had set its fruit already; a Paulonia on which there had been a cloud of ethereal mauve flowers in April; the usual big palms, some yuccas, and in between a little unkempt grass. Some of the plants were in big tubs, but the trees thrust their roots into the red soil of the city and prospered. A half-moon shone on them to-night, and the little breeze that blew to them from the hills was bland and warm.

"It is a paradise," said Andrea.

It was: but Daphne's heart was in England to-night. Ten days of steady, relentless heat had set her thoughts running on English seas breaking on English shores, on the scent of seaweed and salt spray and on a wind that had a bite in it. For nearly six years she had been an exile, and she expected to live and die one. But every now and then some memory or some poignant contract would make her home-sick. If she could have gone with Peggy

Up the beach by the sandy down
Where the sea-stocks bloom, to the white-walled town.
Through the narrow paved streets, where all was still,
To the little gray church on the windy hill.

"But I want to go home," she said. "I want my child."

"Could you have her if you went home?"

Daphne shook her head and smiled slightly as she looked down at her lap which was encircled by her arms: for her hands were clasped upon her knees. She saw her baby sitting there and looking up at her face as the bambino in his picture looked up at his Madonna. Andrea knew what was in her mind.

"There is a well-known English story of a mother who . . . who lost her children as I lost my child. . . . Not in the same way . . . I would not have left my child for anyone in the world. . . . How can any woman? But it happened, and she went back into the house disguised as an old woman and was governess to her own children. I have sometimes thought that if I could do that. . . ."

"A very evil idea," said Andrea firmly. "Most inconvenient and disagreeable for you. If you want your child you must have her: but she must come here."

"That," said Daphne with a sigh, "that is impossible."

"Not at all," said Andrea. "Some things are impossible: but to bring a child from England to Italy is easy."

"She would not be allowed to come."

"Many things are done every day that are not allowed."

"I cannot set myself against the law . . . that I have offended. You might as well set a fly to wreck the Duomo. English law is hard and strong."

"Then don't try to fight it. Ignore it."

"How can I?"

"Take what is yours. Nature is stronger than law."

"I would if I could," said Daphne.

"You want her much . . . very much?"

"More than anything in the world."

"Does she know it? Do you write to her?"

Daphne's eyes widened with surprise and had bitter lights in them that he had never seen before.

"I am not allowed to write," she said. "I am not allowed to see her or even to know that she is well and happy. My husband married a woman I distrust and dislike. He is dead now and my child is in her power. I daren't think of it much. If I did I should go crazy. I once saw that woman beat her own child in a fit of rage. I shall never forget it."

Daphne had turned sick and white with the stress of what she was saying and with the horror of that memory.

"Think not of such wickedness," said Andrea with a shudder. "A woman who is cruel to a child must be a devil. *Che Iddio la castighi!* but you must have your *bambina*."

CHAPTER XVII

ANDREA SARZONI prided himself on being a man of action. When he had made up his mind he went to work. He had saved a little money, he had certain influential friends, and he wanted to see Daphne with her child in her arms. It was always the finished picture that prevailed in his mind and not the intermediate steps to it. Daphne could not be happy because she was separated from her child, and there was nothing in the world that mattered so much to Andrea as her happiness. Evidently, then, he must go to England and get the child for her. It was awkward. Decidedly it was awkward. He spoke a little English, but not much. He knew the child's name and address, but little else about her. There would be difficulties. There might be failure. In that case Daphne would be no worse off than before: while if he succeeded! The picture of her with her baby on her lap dazzled him.

"But the child must be ten years old!" he cried, and was pleased with himself for thinking of it. But he had always been a practical man, methodical and energetic. He was not embarking on an absurd, romantic adventure. Far from it. He did not rush off headlong as your young fool would have done. In silence, and with great care, he made his preparations. The English climate was cold and wet. Everyone knew it. He bought a warm traveling-rug, packed his winter clothes and ordered a new pair of strong boots. He secured his passport. He took his ticket to London and two letters of introduction, one to a highly-placed person in the Italian Embassy who would help him with his passport on his return, and one to the proprietor of a small

restaurant in Soho who would either put him up or tell him where to lodge cheaply. It would be an expensive business, and sometimes the little 'devil of doubt who stops enterprise would whisper in his ear that he was going to be a fool for his pains. Money as hardly and slowly earned as his should not be spent lightly: dissipated in a quest that it was not his business to undertake. But then perhaps he would see Daphne again and be reminded of her empty days by some word she spoke, or even by some turn of her head or glance of her eyes. To think that she should be as lonely as he was himself! He was a man and could bear it: and for him it was bad enough at times. Besides, his music was more to him than music could ever be to her. Also, he was getting old and he was ugly. To see a woman as young and lovely as Daphne with that wistful look in her eyes and about her mouth stirred every tender impulse that his maimed life left unsatisfied. She could never give him her adorable self because he was old and poor and ugly: but if he could give her her child she would be happy and it would rejoice him to see it. He would be a friend to the child too. So he dreamed and planned, the quixotic little man: and when the time came set out for the unknown, having told his pupils that he was taking a fortnight's holiday. He did not say a word to Daphne, but dined with her the night before he started and astutely led their talk after dinner to the north of England, and to her first husband's home there. When she spoke of it by name he said he could not follow her and asked her to write down the name for him. Then he tried to pronounce the name after her, but the scrap of paper on which she wrote it he put in his pocket.

He got to London easily, found his compatriots in Soho and saw the personage at the Italian Embassy, who received him graciously. In Tuscany Andrea had a respected and well-known name as a musician, and when

he explained that he had come partly on business connected with concerts in London there seemed no reason to doubt him. When he showed his passport and said that on his return journey he would possibly have a child of ten with him who had lost her father and was going to a relation in Siena the way was easily made smooth for him. The child of ten was entered on his passport as his traveling companion in the proper office, and nothing remained for him to do after that except to get her. He left London a week after he had left Siena and traveled to Senwick with some maiden ladies who prided themselves on their perspicacity and took him for an anarchist of the most dangerous kind. He looked like it to them. His long, curly hair, his deformed shoulder, his brigand's cloak with its astrakhan collar, his rapt eyes, his incomprehensible English, and the cheap suitcase he carried, as well as his violin, all made them uncomfortable, and so did some sandwiches wrapped in newspaper and made with sausage flavored strongly with garlic that he ate for his lunch. Their sandwiches were wrapped in white paper and flavored with nothing at all, and they drank hot tea out of a Thermos flask. In the tunnels they sat bolt upright and on the alert for the least movement on Andrea's part, for though it was a corridor train and therefore comparatively safe, he might be going to blow up the train or creep out of the compartment and stab his victim. One never knew with these people. However, the day passed and nothing worse happened than the pervasive smell of garlic at lunch-time: and by degrees the elder lady, watching him whenever he shut his eyes, decided that he had a harmless face and was probably a musician on his way to some little post in an orchestra. He did not look to her prosperous enough for anything better than an orchestra. Just before they reached Senwick, having ransacked her memory for one or two phrases learned long ago at

school, she asked him if he was Italian, and was answered by a flood of words in a language she did not understand. Still, she made out the word "Siena" several times, and when he stopped talking she pointed her finger at him and said "Siena" in an interrogative voice while her weaker-minded sister gaped at her courage and her intelligence. It was just like Sophia Pinkney to be talking Italian to an unknown foreign anarchist and asking him his business. For Sophia was now pointing to the violin and saying "musica" in a loud clear voice: and the queer little man was looking at her with the grateful eyes of a dog and chattering some tongue that was not in the least like the three Italian songs she, Agatha, had learnt in her youth. However, he was assiduous in assisting them with their hand luggage when they reached Senwick, and to their surprise descended there himself. They had a fly waiting for them and drove off rather hurriedly, leaving him looking rather desolate just outside the station. But they did not wish to pursue the acquaintance.

Andrea had no Italian friends in Senwick, but he found a humble-looking little inn, secured supper and a bedroom there, and next day managed to make the landlord understand that he wanted to get to Beda Close on Hallinwater. He knew his own lakes and he had bought a map of the English ones in London, so he was able to point when he could not explain. The landlord sent his little boy to put the foreigner on the coach; from the coach Andrea got to the steamer, and on the steamer he saw the two ladies he had traveled with yesterday. To their horror he approached them and took off his hat: which showed that he was no gentleman and pushing: and to their amazement he asked them if they knew a house called Beda Close. Certainly they knew it. They had been at Mrs. Twistleton's party in the summer when poor Mr. Twistleton looked so ill and

when that queer, unkempt step-child had made an unpleasant impression by rushing across the lawn, wet through, in pursuit of the dog that killed the cat. But what could this wandering Italian have to do there, unless he was going to tune the pianos, or regulate the clocks?—which was unlikely. Sophia answered freezingly that the house was not in sight yet, and though Andrea did not understand what she said, he easily understood that he was not wanted. So he sat down a good way off, looked at the scenery and thought about Daphne. Now that his quest was near its end fulfillment looked less possible than ever. The steamer passed large houses set in woods and gardens. How was he to approach the one he wanted, the locked casket holding Daphne's jewel? Would she be guarded by dragons like those two who had just snubbed him: women of a certain age, with enormous teeth, and dressed to frighten rather than to charm? It was a type well known to Andrea. It was to be seen any day in Siena carrying a red Baedeker and gazing earnestly at this and that in the streets and churches. When they had hard chins and high voices and were well dressed they were Americans: but they were all earnest. Some were amiable: some were disagreeable like the two scarecrows opposite. One of them was making signs to him. What did she want? He crossed over and she flapped a gloved, bony hand at a large house on the left-hand shore of the lake.

"That," she said, "is Beda Close. You must get out here if you want to go there."

Then, by turning to her sister, she intimated that she had nothing more to say to Andrea, and he, after lifting his hat to her politely, picked up his violin and went ashore. But before landing he managed to make out that the steamer would call there on its return journey at six o'clock. So he had three hours before him. No one else had got off the steamer when he did, and he

found himself quite alone in a country road. He walked on until he came to a gate opening into a private drive, but there was no name to it so he could not be sure that it led to the house he wanted. As he had plenty of time before him he opened it and walked on. He had no definite plan. If he could find out where Peggy lived and gain speech of her it would be something. Even if he had to go back without her he would be able to give Daphne a message and a picture: more than she had had for years. It was very quiet in this garden. There seemed to be no one about. How orderly it was and how spacious! Trees and shrubs grew on either side as if they liked the climate. Some of the big fir trees he knew because they grew them in Siena on the Lizza. In some places there were primroses. But he saw no cypresses, no olives, and no figs or palms. He missed them and he missed the sunshine. All the morning it had rained and everything was dripping wet. Now it was not raining, but the skies were gray and the wind cold. He shivered and he felt hungry. On what a fool's errand he had come, and what a long way he was from home! Nevertheless, his will and his feet took him forward although his doubts and his desires drove him back: and after walking about half a mile a bend in the drive brought him in full view of the house. It was the one the English woman had shown him from the steamer. It was the home of Daphne's child. From where he stood he could see the door which was at one end of the house, and by going on a little he got a side view of the front that faced the lake and had a lawn and a flower garden going down to the water.

"But it is a paradise," the little man said to himself with a sigh. "When the sun shines it must truly be a paradise. I will sit down here and look at it. I will sit behind a big tree and no one will know I am there."

He sat down behind a big fir tree and ate the remains

of yesterday's sandwiches which he had brought with him. Then he lighted a cigarette and smoked it. If he had been in Italy he would have felt sleepy and had a nap. But it was too chilly and uncomfortable for that in this English garden. The house looked dead to him although some of the windows were open. But no sounds came from it and no one moved outside. Soon he would have to go back on the steamer having done nothing but stare like a zany at a lifeless house. Certainly he could go to the door, ring the bell, and perhaps on some pretext get inside: or he could look for some of the outdoor servants and get into communication with them. Those were the obvious ways of approach, and perhaps to-morrow. . . .

The front door was thrown open and a small white dog followed by a child rushed down the steps and into the garden, both as quick and as light as straws in the wind. The child was thin and lanky, with short skirts and red, ungloved hands. She wore a black tam-o'-shanter crammed on her copper-colored hair, and on her way she had to stop for a fit of coughing. Then she ran on again, calling the dog as she went, and to Andrea's amazement sent it through a fine bed of tulips on the lawn. But a naughty child! An evil child! Never had he seen a child behave in such a manner. The beautiful flowers were being broken. Their stalks snapped where the dog ran, light and quick though he was. Yet again the child ran round the bed and even across it. Such a spirit of destruction he could not understand. From where he stood now he could see her small face, pinched and desperate. Now she stood still to cough again, and the dog stood still too, looking up at her and wagging his tail. As he stood so, as Andrea watched him, a shot from the house burst for one startling moment into the silence of the afternoon. The dog fell dead upon the ground at the feet of the little girl.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE child gave a cry that rent Andrea's heart and flung herself upon the ground beside the dog, calling to it pitifully. Andrea could not hear the name clearly, and from where he stood he could not make out whether the dog had been killed outright or was still alive. He had seen it give a little leap into the air and then fall like a stone. He expected the sound of the shot and of the child's wailing cry to bring other people on the scene, and he knew that if he was not to be discovered he ought to go at once. But he could not make up his mind to go. What he had seen and heard mystified him. The orderly garden, the quiet, opulent-looking house, and then as sudden as lightning this tragedy! Certainly it was only a dog that had been killed, and the child was a naughty child, but to see her misery and her tears was more than Andrea could bear. If no one came he must try and comfort her, and if she was the child he wanted he would ask her to come with him: but he hoped she was not that child. He had pictured himself traveling back to Italy with a little angel of humility and goodness, clothed in immaculate white like the summer children on the Lizza and as easy to manage as a plaster saint. This child, now coming towards him, the dog in her arms, her eyes blinded by tears, her clothes in disarray, was not in the least like the bambina he wanted to place in Daphne's arms. But how the poor creature coughed! How ill she looked: how thin and miserable! He left the shelter of his tree, went a little way further towards the house and met the child with her dog. There was still no one about.

"Peggy!" he said at a venture.

The child was so surprised by his appearance, by his oddity, and by the fact that he knew her name that for a moment she stopped crying. He seemed to have sprung out of the earth in the moment of her great affliction, and, odd-looking as he was, she could see by his eyes that he was kind and felt sorry for her.

"He is dead!" she wailed, and flung herself on the ground again with the dog. "He doesn't move. He doesn't hear me. Dingo . . . Dingo!"

Andrea knelt on the ground too and stroked the dog's head.

"He was very beautiful," he said. "He was your friend?"

Peggy had never heard a foreigner speak English before and she could only just make out what Andrea said: but she was beginning to like him, although his cloak and his hair were frightening. She thought he must be a vagrant musician, and she wondered why he had a violin with him instead of a barrel-organ.

"Have you got a dog or a monkey?" she asked.

He shook his head and glanced uneasily at the door of the house. He felt sure that someone would come out soon and take Peggy away from him, and then his whole scheme would topple in ruins like a house of cards. If only he could have picked her up and carried her away! But that was impossible: and he was as much afraid to hurry her as if she had been a bird ready for flight at the least alarm.

"I have a cat," he said.

"Dingo hated cats," said Peggy, beginning to sob again. "He killed them if he could."

"*E proprio vero?*" murmured Andrea, who only half followed what Peggy said and wanted to seize the incredible luck chance had put in his way.

"I must fetch a spade and dig his grave," said

Peggy, her tears streaming down her woe-begone little face.

"I will help you," said Andrea; "and if you will come a long way from the house where no one will hear us I will play a funeral march over his grave."

"On your violin?"

Andrea nodded.

"We will come to Low Tarn," said Peggy. "No one will hear us there," and she led the way through woods to the wild and lonely tarn where Dingo had loved to swim and she to row. It looked somber and desolate to-day and she shivered with cold as they approached it. A little way back they had passed a gardening shed with tools, and first placing poor Dingo tenderly on the ground she had gone in and found a spade. The condition she was in distressed Andrea terribly. She was breaking her little heart over her dog and her emaciated body was shaken by her cough as well as by her sobs. But she would not let him carry the dog for her. She wanted to feel the soft fur of his head against her cheek from time to time, and to talk to him though he could not hear. When they reached the edge of the tarn, and stood amongst the tangle of dead bracken and springing weeds that fringed its brim, she stood there for a moment, looking silently at its opal waters, the image of despair. Andrea guessed that she was invoking memories in which her dead playmate had a share and did not disturb her. When she turned away to find a place amongst the trees for a grave he followed her, and when she stopped he put down his violin, took off his long cloak and dug a hole for her. Then, before putting the dog in, he lined it with leaves and little branches and had other leaves ready for a covering. He collected them with care, choosing some of last year's that were still golden and some from the tips of larches that were a tender green: and as he performed this work of mercy

for her the child watched him in wonder. She saw that he was deformed and altogether odd-looking, but his kindness was like balm. It was a black moment when Dingo had to be lowered into the hole, but Andrea would not spin it out. He persuaded the child to let him take the dog from her, he buried it slowly, and then taking his violin from its case he began to play. While he did so his eyes were as rapt as if he saw invisible choirs playing in unison with him, and Peggy, watching him, thought that he had forgotten her and Dingo and everything except his music. She had never heard such music before, and it was in her as it was in her mother to be affected by it. She listened quietly, and the solemn strains of the funeral march he chose stole upon her spirit and gave it rest. When he came to the last chord she sighed.

"Can you come again to-morrow?" she said: but Andrea, who was putting his violin in its case, shook his head.

"To-morrow I shall be far away," he said.

"I should like to hear you play every day," said Peggy.

"I should like to play like that myself."

"If you will come with me I will teach you," said Andrea. He wanted to say many other things. He wanted to ask her who had killed her dog and also to tell her everything he could about her mother, but he spoke English with difficulty, and found it easier to answer what she said than to introduce new subjects.

"How can I come with you?" said Peggy, staring at him: and as she spoke she shivered with cold.

Andrea, who had put on his cloak again, sat down beside her and wrapped some of it round her shoulders, so they sat there together snug and friendly.

"If you will come with me I shall take you to your mother," he said. "She is my friend. Nearly every day I am at her house and we play together."

"My mother!" exclaimed Peggy. "Are you sure that you know my mother?"

"Quite sure. She told me your name and the name of this house, and I have come all the way from Siena to fetch you. She is unhappy till she has you in her arms."

"I don't remember her much," said Peggy, in great doubt and uneasiness. The man was kind, but he was odd, and suppose he carried her to a cave!

But he did not look like that.

"Should we walk there?" she inquired. "Should you play the violin and I go round collecting pennies? Where is Siena?"

"In Italy. Your mother lives there. She has a garden with a cherry-tree in it. She would let you pick the cherries. You would not shiver there or cough."

"But I am not allowed to be with her," she explained. "I am obliged to live with my step-mother."

"Do you love her?"

"I hate her," cried Peggy, her eyes gleaming and vindictive. "She killed Dingo. I never want to see her again."

"Then come with me. I will take you to your mother, who is an angel."

"But I can't come with you just as I am."

"Why not?"

"I must have a trunk with clothes. I have a new one of my own that I took to Grange."

"You talk folly, little one. If you go back to the house for a trunk you will never see me again and your mother will cry every day because she has lost her child."

"Does she?" said Peggy, much impressed.

"Every day!"

"Will she be glad to see me if I come?"

"So glad that every day will be a *festa*. She will give

you cherries to eat, and pretty white frocks to wear, and I will give you my cat."

"Dingo didn't like cats," said Peggy. "I don't think I could make friends with a cat just yet for his sake."

"Do you like little green parrakeets? There is a girl I often see who has some for sale. She carries them about in a wicker cage. We will go for a walk together, and when we meet her we will buy them."

"If I come with you," said Peggy doubtfully. "I wish Mr. Gerard was here."

"Who is that?"

"He is my guardian. He would tell me what to do. He gave me Dingo. But he is in Australia and Dingo is dead. I wish I was dead."

"But what a horror for a child to say! Why do you say it?"

Peggy began to cry again: and then she coughed and shivered all over her body with cold. What an uncomfortable country, thought Andrea, where the skies are gray and the earth wet and the children miserable and thin. He looked at his watch and saw that it was time to go.

"Tell me your name and the name of this house and the name of your mother," he said, for it occurred to him that he had better make sure of Peggy being the right child. Yes: she was the right child. She said the unpronounceable English names as Daphne said them, but she knew nothing about her mother except what she could remember.

"She wore a blue dress and she took me on her knee and called me her ladybird and her pigeon," said Peggy.

"She wore a blue dress last time I saw her," said Andrea, whose arm was round the child now, keeping her warm within his cloak. "If you come you shall soon sit on her knee again."

"I'm too big now."

"To her you will seem little. All these years she has loved you and wept for you. Her beautiful eyes are worn with tears. Be kind to her. Come!"

Peggy could not resist. With some misgivings but with an exciting sense of adventure she put her hand in Andrea's and led him by a short cut through the woods to the landing-stage for the steamer. She would have liked to fetch her fur coat but Andrea would not let her risk it. He said he would buy her what she wanted next day in London. He seemed to be a very nervous man, she thought. At the least sound he stopped and looked anxiously around him, and while they waited for the steamer he hid with her in the shelter and only emerged when the one or two passengers alighting had their backs to him. Then he hurried her on deck and down to the cabin where he said she would be warmer. On the coach he kept her snug beneath his cloak again. Peggy saw no one she knew until they were in the main street of Senwick, when she passed the younger Miss Pinkney, who stared at her and seemed about to speak but apparently thought better of it. Andrea was muttering to himself at the time and seemed to be in a hurry. At his inn he left her downstairs with a woman who let her sit by the fire and gave her some tea and bread-and-butter and hot buttered teacake which she enjoyed very much.

"Wheer 'sta bahn wi' t'furren gentleman?" asked the woman, looking at her curiously.

"To Italy," said Peggy.

"Where's that?"

Peggy could not tell her. It was a long way off, she said, but her mother lived there and had sent the foreign gentleman to fetch her.

"What's the like o' he know about childer?" asked the woman, with a sniff. "Yer moother sud 'a coom hersel'," and when Andrea appeared with his cheap suit-

case and his violin in his hands she told him that Peggy was not warmly enough dressed for a night journey. But Andrea, if he heard, did not answer. He put some money on the table, took Peggy by one hand, and raced through the town so quickly that the child began to cough again.

"The train . . . the train!" he said. "We are late. We must run."

It was high time. As they reached the platform the guard put his whistle to his lips, but opened a door when he saw Andrea and Peggy tearing towards him. He bundled them into an empty compartment as the train began to move and thought no more about them. He took Andrea for a traveling musician and Peggy for his child.

CHAPTER XIX

ANDREA refused dinner on the train. He did not want to multiply the chances of detection or failure. But Peggy told him soon after they started that she was hungry, so by tipping the guard he managed to get a luncheon-basket when they stopped at Preston and a glass of milk for the child. There was no one else in their compartment and they had a picnic meal together that Peggy enjoyed. Andrea buttered her roll for her and gave her the wing of the chicken and the big orange. He ate what he could of a dry-looking leg and found that the little orange was moldy: but he did not seem to mind. When they had finished he wrapped her in his cloak, making a pillow for her head of some of it, and then he let her lie at full length on the seat while he sat up opposite and stared out of the closed window. Every now and then she felt afraid of what she had done, and afraid of him because he was so queer and ugly, but he seemed to guess when she felt unhappy and would call her little affectionate names that she did not understand. However, she understood the tones of his voice and his ways of petting her and attending to her comfort: and by the time she lay down in his cloak she felt safe with him. In two minutes she fell fast asleep and Andrea watched her, anxious and wide awake. He could not feel either safe or triumphant yet. The powers of the wire and the telephone were against him. He might be met at Euston by detectives with warrants for his arrest. He supposed he was committing some crime against the English law in abducting Peggy, and

that if they were discovered she would be snatched from him. He had a miserable journey, starting at every footstep and listening to every sound. Besides, he was bitter cold without his cloak, and the ancient chicken leg had not satisfied his hunger. When he roused Peggy just before they reached London she began to cry because she was not at home in bed, and then she wanted her breakfast, although he explained that it was two o'clock in the morning and therefore not time for breakfast yet. She was still crying when the train stopped at Euston, and as he helped her out she told him she wanted to go back at once. He pretended not to understand, but, taking her by the hand, led her hastily through the crowd descending from the train and through the empty-looking station into the Euston Road, where by good luck he found a taxi that took them to his friends in Soho. They were naturally in bed, and it took time to rouse them, but when they found that he, Andrea Sarzoni, stood there in the street and had brought the bambina with him their excitement expressed itself in ways that Peggy, at any rate, had never seen before. A key was turned, a door was opened, and a whole family of strange-looking people, all talking at once, seemed to take possession of her. Andrea talked too, very fast and very loud. She did not know what any of them were saying. But a girl with big black eyes and fuzzy black hair took her on her knee, while another girl got a tray ready with tea and bread-and-butter and cold ham. They gave her that, but a few minutes later they brought Andrea a plate heaped up with steaming macaroni and a bottle of wine: and Peggy watched him eat the macaroni as Italians do, rolling it round his fork and swallowing more at a time than she thought polite. But his friends seemed to be just as kind as he was, and when they put her to bed the bed was white and clean. That was all she knew till next day, when the dark-eyed girl came in to help

her wash and dress and told her they must be quick because the train started in an hour.

"Are we going back?" she said to Andrea: and she suddenly felt afraid and forlorn. She did not want to go back, she found, when it came to the point. He did not hear her because he seemed to be settling accounts with his friends: and after farewells that embraced Peggy as warmly as they did him, the travelers got into a cab accompanied by the dark-eyed girl, who now wore a coat displaying a good deal of neck and a ribbon toque with a feather trimming. They stopped at a big shop on the way, and in a frenzy of haste the girl rushed Peggy upstairs to the first floor and said that she wanted a warm traveling-coat for this young lady, and one of those on the nearest stand would do, and if they couldn't serve her that moment she wouldn't have one at all. A hop pole in black moved languidly forward, took the Italian girl's measure and did not think much of it, and brought forward a cheap-looking creation in black and buff squares, like a draught-board.

"'Orrible!" said the Italian, whose English aitches were not her strong point.

An altercation ensued that Peggy settled by asking for a rose-colored coat with a fur collar that was on show by itself and expensive. However, the Italian produced the money for it, put it over her arm, and rushed Peggy down to the taxi, where they found Andrea fidgeting on the pavement and certain that they would lose their train. But they just caught it, and as it moved off the Italian, who still had the coat on her arm, gave a dramatic shriek and stuffed it through the window.

"*Ecco!*" cried Andrea, and tried to put it on over Peggy's black coat, which was impossible. With a gesture of despair he put both his hands to his head and seemed about to tear his hair.

"Poor little one," he cried. "It is too small, and now

you will die of cold and your mother will continue to weep and I shall not be able to console her."

"But I never wear two coats of the same kind," explained Peggy. "I'll put on the pink one and carry the black one over my arm."

He sighed loudly, shrugged his shoulders, felt both the coats to appraise their thickness, decided in favor of the new one and helped Peggy to complete the change.

"Your uncle seems very fond of you," said an elderly man traveling in the same compartment, when Andrea had gone into the corridor to see if he could get Peggy a glass of milk.

"He isn't my uncle," said Peggy. "I don't know who he is."

"Really!" said the elderly man. "Then how do you come to be traveling with him?"

"He is taking me to see my mother," said Peggy, after a moment's consideration: but when the elderly man left the carriage she told Andrea what he had said.

"I didn't tell him we had run away together, and I didn't tell him my name," she added.

"You should not have told him anything," said Andrea, in a fidget at once. "If we are found you will be taken away from me and you will never see that most beautiful angel your mother, or the cherries in her garden, or the Archbishop in his robes and his red silk gloves as I have promised you. You will never see Siena at all. You will go back to the wet, cold garden and weep beside the grave of your little dog and remember your poor Andrea who would have placed you on your mother's knee and seen her dry her eyes. Come here now and let me button your coat, which is the color of the big oleander in one corner of your mother's garden. We are at Dover, and on the sea it will be bitter cold. Also, I shall suffer much from sea-sickness and not be able to talk to you. Therefore I will take you down to the ladies' cabin and

ask the stewardess to attend to you if you too are ill."

But at Calais Peggy bobbed up as fresh as paint, and explained to Andrea, who looked green, that she had not stayed ten minutes in the ladies' cabin because it was stuffy. She had gone up on deck and had talked to ever so many people, and they had all wanted to know who she was and where she was going: so she had told them that she was going to Italy with her uncle, who was a brigand, and that they meant to live in a cave on the top of a mountain and take money from the rich in order to give to the poor. A disagreeable old lady had called her a little story-teller, so she had pointed to Andrea, who was very ill at the time, and someone with the old lady had said he certainly looked like a brigand or a hurdy-gurdy man. Someone else had wondered aloud where Peggy's pink coat came from, and she had told them that an Italian girl had just walked into a shop, thrown it over her arm and run down with it to the brigand who was waiting below. After this they had not talked to her much, but she made friends with a sailor who had been listening with a grin on his face, and told her he had a little girl just her age and as fond of a yarn as she seemed to be. She had told him about her father dying last October, and then he had asked her how she came to be wearing a pink coat: and that reminded her that she was in mourning and ought to have bought a black one.

Andrea listened to her prattle, only half understanding it and only half realizing that they were a conspicuous couple, even in a cosmopolitan traveling crowd. People stared at them, and that made him fear they were being watched and followed. He was thankful when the train moved out of Calais station and he found himself in a compartment with French people who talked to each other and hardly glanced his way. He was going to risk

dining on the train, but as he went to the restaurant car with Peggy he told her to keep quiet and say nothing of their affairs. She was enjoying herself tremendously. No adventure she had ever had could compare with this one, and it seemed to get more glorious every hour. The last shadow of fear and distrust had vanished from her mind and she now regarded Andrea much as she had regarded Dingo. He could not speak her tongue quite satisfactorily, but she could make him understand what she wanted and he was invariably ready to do it. He looked at her with the same adoring eyes, and he seemed to know when her cough hurt her, which of course poor Dingo had not been able to do. They had a lovely dinner at a little table set for two, and after it they had black, sweet coffee. Andrea said it was not good for her, but he let her have it. He was not a bit like Mr. Gerard, who was kind but would stand no nonsense. Peggy knew by this time that Andrea would stand anything. After dinner Andrea fell fast asleep, but Peggy did not feel sleepy. Perhaps it was the black coffee. At any rate, she was wide awake and tired of sitting still, so as other people were passing to and fro in the corridor she thought she would go out there too and see what was happening. A young man leaning against an open window engaged her in conversation, and surprised her by saying that they would soon arrive in Paris.

"Is it a nice place?" said Peggy.

"Rather!" said the young man, slightly shutting one eye. "You get the best chocolates in the world there." He looked at her pink coat. "And the prettiest clothes," he added. He pulled out his handkerchief and waved it towards Peggy. It smelt of fresh violets. "And the most heavenly scents and soaps," he went on. "You are a lucky child to be going there."

Peggy looked at him pensively, turned on her heel and went back to her seat opposite Andrea. She had to

shake him hard before she could wake him, and then he only looked half awake.

"This train isn't going to Siena at all," she said shrilly. "It is going to Paris."

"Little angel, I know it," said Andrea sleepily. "Paris is on the way to Siena."

"How long shall we stay there?"

"We shall not stay at all. We shall drive across it and get into another train."

"But I want to stay there," said Peggy. "I want to buy some chocolates. Besides, I'm very tired and my cough hurts me. I want to go to bed. Can't we go to Siena to-morrow or the day after . . . when we've seen the chocolate-shops?"

Andrea hesitated. He was tired himself, but he had made up his mind to get on to Italy where he knew what to do next and felt at home.

"To-morrow night we shall sleep in Genoa," he coaxed. "I have told you about Genoa. I shall take you to see the Sign of the Cock made of glass grapes and the leopard in the Zoological Gardens. You will see great ships there and the sea and mountains. It is a fine city."

"We can go there after Paris," said Peggy.

"But your mother who weeps for you. . . ."

"She has wept a long time. A day or two more couldn't make much difference. If we stayed in Paris we could take her a box of chocolates and some scent and some soap. I'm sure she would like them."

"I've no friends in Paris now," argued Andrea. "I know of no hotel."

Peggy was out of the carriage and into the corridor as quick as lightning. She touched her friend of the handkerchief on the arm.

"Do you know of a hotel in Paris?" she asked.

"I know a good many," he said amused. "I stay at the Scribe."

"Do you mind if my uncle and I come there too? My uncle is Italian and he doesn't know much about Paris, he says. He wants to go straight on to Genoa, but I want to stay in Paris."

"What about your luggage?" asked the young man.

"He has his with him and I came away without any," said Peggy. "Perhaps I could buy some things in Paris to-morrow. It was what you said about soap that made me think of it . . . partly. I've no soap and no sponge and no comb or toothbrush. It's so inconvenient."

"But have you lost your luggage?"

"Not exactly. I came away in a hurry and left it at home. But I am enjoying myself very much. My uncle is a very kind man."

"On which side are you Italian? You look thoroughly English."

"I am!" cried Peggy. "He just happens to be my uncle. I think I'll tell him the name of that hotel before I forget it."

She ran off and found that Andrea was wide awake now and ready for their arrival in Paris.

"We can stop at the Hotel Scribe," she said. "Someone out there in the corridor is going there and told me the name. I told him you were my uncle. Will the shops be shut when we get there? I want a sponge and a comb and a toothbrush and a nightgown."

"All those things you could buy in Genoa," said Andrea.

"I should like to stop in Genoa too," said Peggy. "I like traveling . . . at least, I like it with you, darling Uncle Andrea. . . . I didn't want to go with them and leave Dingo behind. . . . I wish you had come a little sooner. We might have brought Dingo with us. Poor Dingo!"

CHAPTER XX

THE young man was amused. He arrived at the hotel at the same moment as the English child in the rose-colored coat and the deformed Italian who carried a violin. As they could not speak much French he interpreted for them, and he was commanded by Peggy to say that she required a nightgown, a sponge, a toothbrush and a comb.

"I can buy a brush to-morrow," she explained. The young man was used to odd people and various nationalities because his business obliged him to travel a good deal: but his experience made him a good judge, and he felt sure that Andrea and Peggy did not belong to each other. However, their affairs were not his, and if he felt sorry for one of the two, it was for Andrea, who seemed to be putty in the child's hands.

"Little angel," Andrea had said, "I cannot buy you these things to-night. The shops are shut." But the little angel had said that it was impossible to go to bed without them and that she would like a glass of milk and a few chocolates as well. So a waiter and a chambermaid and the young man had conferred together, and the young man produced a box of chocolates that he presented to Peggy, while the chambermaid called her a little angel in French and helped her to wash in a small dressing room off her bedroom where there was a big basin and hot water out of a tap. Peggy liked being a little angel and getting everything she asked for. She liked her room at the hotel that had an enormous high window with brocade curtains and a sofa and chairs covered with red velvet. To go fast to sleep and then

next morning to wake in it was like waking to a dream that lasted. She managed to wash and dress herself, and when she was ready Andrea was ready too, and they had breakfast together in her room: a delicious breakfast of chocolate and rolls and butter and eggs. After breakfast he asked her what she would like to do, and she said she would like to find the chocolate-shops and buy herself some clothes.

"Chocolates, yes: but not clothes," said Andrea, resisting her for once. "Your mother will get you clothes."

"Will they be as good in Siena as in Paris?" asked Peggy: and Andrea said he did not know, but that he was not going to buy any as he could not trust either his taste or hers. Besides, neither of them could talk French. Peggy said that she could talk enough to get chocolates if she saw them in a shop window, so the odd pair sallied forth together for a day in Paris. There was a little trouble in the first chocolate-shop they passed because Peggy wanted a big box which Andrea said she should have but could not carry about with her. They must be sent to the hotel.

"But if they are sent to the hotel I can't eat them," replied Peggy. "We want to be out all day and see everything in Paris."

"Little angel, if you eat chocolates all day you will be ill," argued Andrea. "One or two are good, but many are evil. This small box you may have to carry with you, but the other we shall take to your mother in Siena."

"Perhaps you are right," conceded Peggy, who had eaten a good many chocolates the night before and knew very well that Andrea was right. "I think I'll send the small box to the hotel too," she said on consideration. "It would be very awkward if I was ill on the journey."

Andrea praised her wisdom, which, he said, was remarkable in one so young, and then hailed a taxi in which

they drove to the Louvre together, through the gay, crowded Paris streets. They had a long, rapturous morning amongst the pictures and sculptures, and Andrea said that her intelligence rejoiced and surprised him. They went through the galleries arm in arm and he told her what he could in his broken English. When he came to the Italians he knew little stories about the old painters that made her ask if they were alive and his friends; so he tried to explain their dates to her, and the date of the Venus of Milo, before whom they stayed until Peggy began to fidget and say she was hungry. By that time it was one o'clock, and Andrea took another taxi and drove to a restaurant full of people having lunch. There they met the young man of the train, who was looking out for them and had reserved a table for three on the first floor. He had ordered lunch too—the most attractive lunch, that began with a sole for Peggy and mussels for the men. At least, the men really began with cocktails, and Andrea let Peggy taste his, but she did not like it. She liked everything else, and especially the ices at the end, and after lunch she felt so sleepy that Andrea persuaded her to go back to the hotel and lie down. He tucked her up in an eiderdown, darkened the room, and promised to wake her when it was time to go out again. But she waked by herself with the feeling of having slept for hours, and when she peeped into Andrea's room he was not there. For a moment panic took her by the throat. Suppose he had gone for good and left her there alone, without a penny, in a foreign land? Suppose his kindness was a delusion and his promises a snare? What would become of her? There, to be sure, were his violin and his suit-case, but he might have left them as she had left everything she possessed, in order to get away. A child of ten does not reason much or inquire into motives. Here she stood forlorn and deserted in a strange hotel, still heavy with

sleep, inclined to fears, more used to unkindness than to love. She began to cry, and crying made her cough come on badly. Andrea could not understand what was happening when he came into the room with his arms full of parcels and found Peggy damp and crumpled in one corner of her red velvet sofa, the room still dark and sad. He put his parcels on the table, drew back the curtains and took the silly child in his arms.

"I thought you had gone away," she sobbed.

He coaxed and fondled her, with a warm feeling about his heart. In less than two days he had so won hers that she wept for him, the dear little one, and ceased to weep when he appeared.

"See now what I have brought for you," he said, and opened the parcels he had put on the table. He had been out and about while she slept, it seemed, and had got her the things she needed most for the rest of the journey: a nightgown, a sponge and comb and brushes, and a warm dressing-gown for the night. Some Madeleines, too, and a flask that he meant to have filled with milk before they started. Peggy dried her eyes and tried on the dressing-gown, which was blue and suited her copper-colored hair better than the pink coat did. Then she got ready to go out again, and after giving her tea in a tea-shop he took her for a drive in the Bois.

The journey to Genoa took nearly twenty-four hours and Peggy was very tired when they arrived there. So was Andrea. He had not been able to get sleepers, and they had been obliged to sit up all night in an overcrowded carriage. Peggy's cough had been troublesome, not only to herself but to her fellow-travelers. They said it kept them from sleeping. Andrea observed that it also kept the child from sleeping, but that idea did not seem to appease them. They said a child in a state like that ought not to be traveling at all. What was her mother thinking about?

"Probably about the child," snapped Andrea, who felt cross and sleepy himself. "We are on our way to her."

Then a good-natured person had offered Peggy oranges for her cough, and she had eaten two, but had made her fingers sticky and spilt the juice on her new coat. Andrea took her outside to wash her hands and rub off the stains on the coat, and when they got back an extra stout person had spread into Peggy's corner and was snoring there. He had to be waked, and he did not like it. Besides, he made Peggy more uncomfortable than she need have been by going to sleep again and allowing his mountainous body to fall heavily against her. Andrea changed places with her and drove a bony but muscular elbow into his neighbor whenever he encroached. That brought about an argument volubly conducted in Italian by Andrea and in Serbian by the fat man. They did not understand each other's words, but they understood each other's hisses and gestures. When they subsided, Peggy had a fresh fit of coughing and said she wanted her breakfast. Andrea got out the flask of milk and found that it had gone sour. That upset him visibly, and seeing this the Serbian took a Thermos from his bag and gave Peggy a cup of hot tea from it. After that everyone dozed off for an hour or two, but no one could get much sleep because of Peggy's cough, which was fitful but persistent. She explained that she did not cough on purpose, but her fellow-travelers had an air of not believing her. One or two of them looked for other seats but could not find any. The night was long, dry and weary. After dawn broke it seemed hours before breakfast was ready in the restaurant car.

"I thought I liked traveling, but I'm not sure that I do," said Peggy, who looked ill and heavy-eyed now. "I want to go to bed. Can't we get out at the next station and stay at another hotel till to-morrow? I don't want to stop in this horrid old train all day."

But Andrea was determined to go on. When Peggy had washed and had breakfast she seemed better again, and by day her cough was not quite as troublesome as it had been by night. He would have telegraphed to Daphne to meet them at Genoa, but there was a postal and telegraph strike on and he knew that he could get to Siena before his message. His thoughts often went to the child's English home and the steps that must have been taken by this time for her recapture. They must have been seen together in the boat and again on the train. After that, London was large, and he hoped that he had covered his tracks. He knew little enough about children, but he could partly see and partly judge from what Peggy told him that she had been badly used by her step-mother. When she fell asleep in the train she had more than once waked in a fright with scared eyes and a shrinking body that told their own tale.

"I dreamed that she had come for me," she said the first time, and henceforward Andrea knew that when Peggy waked like that he must speak to her at once and comfort her.

They stayed two nights in Genoa because Peggy insisted on seeing the leopard in the Zoological Gardens and the Sign of the Cock made of glass grapes and the big ships about to sail for South America.

"Are you in no hurry then to see your mother?" he asked her.

"Not particularly," said Peggy. "I may not like her."

"But I tell you that she is an angel."

Peggy looked at him skeptically. "You call me an angel," she pointed out, "but you know I'm not one. *She* used to call me a little devil. I felt like one, too, when she beat me. I bit her once."

"Talk not of those evil days," said Andrea. "They are over and will not come again. A child should always remember the Holy Bambino who sits on his Mother's

knee and smiles. A child should be happy and good. Why did you allow your little dog to destroy those beautiful flowers? When I first saw you I thought I had never seen so evil a child, and that I would not take you to your mother to make her weep even more than she does when she sits alone."

Peggy did not like to say so, but, as a matter of fact, Andrea's picture of a mother for ever in tears did not attract her. She admired people like Mr. Gerard, who met life with smiles and faced trouble as if it was a jest. She had quite made up her mind that when she was old enough to travel by herself she would go across the world, if need be, and see him again. He still had the paramount place in her heart. Andrea was kindness itself, and she loved him, but as a rule she could twist him round her little finger. Mr. Gerard was kind, but he could not be twisted, and when you yourself are a creature of moods and impulses wanting this and that, tempestuous inside and inclined to naughtiness, you are attracted by a nature stronger than your own. Peggy tried to explain why she had led Dingo across the tulip-bed, but she could only make Andrea understand that she had done wrong deliberately, and that made him shake his head and hope she would not break her mother's heart. When they got to Pisa he took her to see the Leaning Tower and followed her to the top, grumbling to himself in Italian all the way. When they got nearly to the top she insisted on running round the outside, although he told her they would certainly turn dizzy and fall and be dashed to pieces. But he went with her, though he hated it and looked quite pale for some time afterwards. He turned paler still when she said she would like to take her step-mother up there and see her fall over.

"I wouldn't push her," she assured him, "but if she fell and killed herself I shouldn't cry. I don't suppose

it would hurt much. Besides, she killed Dingo. I want to hurt her really. I want her to be like those people in the picture on the wall . . . the ones that are having spears thrust through them for ever and for ever . . . she deserves it."

Andrea sighed and talked about the Bambino again, but Peggy would not unsay what she had said. Nor would she look forward to the reunion with her mother as he did. She said she did not remember her much, and hoped she would be nice.

"If I don't like her can I come and live with you?" she inquired, but Andrea shook his head.

"You will adore her," he prophesied.

"She may not like me," suggested Peggy. "I'm not usually liked."

"But *Grazie a Dio*, you are her child!"

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Peggy.

CHAPTER XXI

PEGGY felt queer and tired when she arrived at Siena late that afternoon. It was daylight and yet she wanted to go to bed. Her cough had been troublesome in the train and her chest ached with it. In spite of her new cloak she looked like a little ragamuffin, but that did not trouble her nor did Andrea think about it. He was in a state of suppressed excitement, avoiding people he knew and bustling Peggy into one of the little open carriages waiting at the station.

"Our horse has got feathers on its head," she murmured, and waked up enough to see other horses with tall feathers sticking bolt upright from their foreheads. She had seen them in Genoa and Pisa but had not driven behind one yet.

"Ours has a blue feather as well as brown ones," she said, and then shut her eyes again.

Andrea thanked his stars that he had brought her safely so far and hoped he had not brought her here to die. She went up and down in a manner he did not understand. This morning on the stairs of the Leaning Tower she had run about like quicksilver, she had eaten hardly anything at lunch, and ever since she had flagged. But now she would have her mother and, if necessary, the good doctors of Siena: so all was well. He had ceased to be troubled by fears of pursuit. From what Peggy told him she was not beloved by her step-mother, so probably that evil woman was glad to be rid of the child and would take no steps to get her back. . . . He could hardly wait for the moment when he would put her

into her mother's arms, and as they drove through the crowded main street of the city his eyes were rapt as they were when he was playing and he did not speak. They stopped first at his own lodging, where he got rid of his suit-case and his violin, and then they drove on to the quiet airy corner where Daphne lived. "See, little lamb, see!" he cried, pointing upwards. "There is your mother's garden. There is her cherry-tree. Come, open your eyes. You shall soon be in a soft white bed, and to-morrow there will be no train."

He paid the cabman, put his arm round Peggy to help her upstairs, and when he got to the third floor rang the bell. The Italian maid took them into Daphne's sitting-room, which had a great many flowers and books in it, a grand piano, and not much furniture. From the window there was a view of the hills, and another window opened on a tiled terrace with seats and on the crowded little garden. But Peggy had no time to look about her much because a lady came into the room and then stood still and stared at her in surprise. She had a pretty pale pink color in her cheeks that went away as she stared. She did not speak. She looked startled and incredulous. She looked at Andrea, and he did not speak either at first. He tried to, and the words died in his throat. Peggy liked the lady. She was young and very pretty, with fair, wavy hair that covered her ears and was gathered in a knot at the back of her head. She had beautiful blue eyes, and a wistful mouth. Her hands were lovely. Peggy noticed them at once because they were so white and slender. She wore a dress as blue as cornflowers and as straight as a nightgown: but she had on a jeweled girdle that kept it in its place. Peggy went up to her.

"Are you my real mother?" she said, and that seemed to break the spell. The lady gave a cry of joy and took Peggy into her arms, while Andrea spoke Italian as fast

as he could and waved his hands. Daphne spoke Italian too, so Peggy could not follow them. But before long she was sitting close to her mother on a sofa and being kissed over and over again and petted. Her mother had soft, comfortable arms and a tender voice that made her feel sleepy and happy. Indeed, she fell asleep while Daphne gave orders for a room to be got ready and while Andrea told the lady of his dreams about his journey to Beda Close and back again.

"What made you think of it?" said Daphne.

"You did," said Andrea. "Always I saw your arms with the Bambina in them, and the Bambina was not there. Now you will no longer weep. You will smile and I shall be there to see."

"But it was such an impossible thing to do."

"It is done," said Andrea, with a deep bow, and then he took his departure, leaving mother and child together as he had seen them from the moment he had started on his quest. But before he went he told Daphne the little he had gleaned from Peggy's chatter about her life at Beda Close and the little had been enough. Daphne's face had bitterness in it as she watched the sleeping child and noted the neglected condition of her clothes and the half-starved look of her face that was pinched and black under the eyes. When Giuditta came to say that everything was ready, Daphne waked Peggy and took her into a room that led out of her room. It had a tiled floor and Italian inlaid furniture, and the open window looked across the farm lands towards the hills. It was an airy, high room, and when Peggy had had a comforting hot bath and put on the new nightgown bought for her in Paris she lay in bed and looked at the angels painted on the ceiling: while her mother gathered up the clothes she had worn on the journey and told Giuditta to carry them away.

"Why has she taken my clothes?" said Peggy, watching

the old woman. "I shall want them to-morrow morning."

"I will get you others," said Daphne. "Some of yours want washing and some are only fit to burn. Who looked after your clothes?"

"Mr. Gerard did once when I had been ill," said Peggy. "He sent me a trunkful from Manchester and a fur coat. I wanted to fetch my fur coat for the journey, but Uncle Andrea said that if I did I might be stopped and not be able to run away with him. So he wrapped me in his cloak till we got to London and then he bought me that pink coat. But I chose it. Do you like it?"

"Not very much," said Daphne. "Who is Mr. Gerard?"

"He is my guardian."

"Is he old or young?"

Peggy had never considered the question. When you are ten all grown-up people seem old.

"His hair isn't gray," she said after a pause. "Are you old?"

"I'm nineteen years older than you."

"That is very old," said Peggy, and turned her attention to a tray with supper that Giuditta brought in just then. When she sat up to eat it her mother put a warm, soft white shawl round her thin shoulders and kissed her as she did so.

"I like you to touch me," said Peggy. "You make me feel happy. You smell of flowers. Why didn't you send Uncle Andrea for me years ago, when I was quite little? Why did you leave me with *her*?"

"I couldn't help it, darling," murmured Daphne.

"Well, don't cry," said Peggy, cracking a second egg. "I'm here now, and they won't be able to find me. It's such a long way off. If they do come we shall have to hide. You wouldn't ever let me go back, would you?"

"Never," said Daphne. "Never. We would run away together."

"I hope Mr. Gerard won't come," said Peggy anxiously.

"Don't you like him?"

"I like him better than anyone in the world except you . . . but I don't want him to come because if he said I must go away I should have to go."

"Why?"

"I should have to. I don't know why. But if he says I am to go back to her I shall run up to the top of a high tower like the one at Pisa and throw myself over the edge."

"My dear child, don't say such things, don't have such thoughts."

"I can't help having them. When I saw the pictures on the wall of people in Hell I wished she was there. I hope she will be some day. She murdered Dingo, my little dog. She was always beating me or making me go hungry or knocking me about. I won't go back to her. I won't! I won't! Even if Mr. Gerard says I must I won't. I'd rather be dead. You won't let me go back, will you? I want to stay with you always. I don't suppose I shall be as wicked with you as I was with her. I'll try not to be. I suppose I was born wicked. They said you were, but I don't believe it now I know you."

Peggy had begun to talk of her step-mother while the tray was still on her knees, and she grew so excited as she turned towards her mother that she nearly upset it. So Daphne took it from her and set it down: and it was while she did this that she listened to her child's miserable story. It moved her more than she wanted Peggy to understand: and more than she understood herself in the primary shock of revelation. Her immediate idea was to calm the child's feverish excitement, and she did this by putting her arms round her, settling her in bed again, and telling her about the pleasant things in store

for her to-morrow. She must sleep all night first, and in the morning she should have breakfast in bed because she was not quite well yet, and when she got up she should find some new clothes ready for her. Her mother would go out early after breakfast and buy them.

"But you won't go far, will you?" said Peggy, looking so scared that her mother put her arms round her again. "Suppose you were away and they came to fetch me?"

Daphne stayed with her till she fell asleep and then went into the dining-room for her evening meal. She knew that Giuditta must be full of curiosity, but she did not feel inclined to talk to her yet. She wanted to be alone. Peggy's arrival had taken her by storm. She had not been able to think of anything at first except the child's bodily needs, although even while she attended to these she was receiving impressions that helped to bridge the stolen years. Six years she had lost! Six empty interminable years when she should have watched her child day by day, taking pride in her growth, loving her passionately, keeping her from harm. They could never be made good. Twice while she dined she left her dinner to look at Peggy, fast asleep now, but coughing sometimes in her sleep. The child looked miserably thin and ill: and that scared look in her pretty eyes told its tale.

"I will never let her go back," she said vehemently to Andrea when he came in that evening. "She is ill. She had been badly treated. She shall never go back."

They were sitting together on the little tiled terrace that led to the garden, and above them the sky was full of stars. The air was as bland as on a midsummer night and Daphne needed no wrap over her thin blue gown. She had thanked Andrea and made him happy by her thanks, but he saw that she was not as simply happy herself as he had expected her to be. Apparently there were forces to reckon with that he had not fore-

seen but which she feared and hated. He had never seen her so moved, and he had not thought that she could be so bitter and so angry.

"They will try to take her away from me," she explained.

"But they will not know that she is with you," argued Andrea. "How should they know? Besides," he continued, "you say that the step-mother has ill-treated her. Therefore she cannot love her. Therefore she will be glad that the child has disappeared. Perhaps she will have trouble with the police. That does not matter to us."

The poor man was disappointed. He had expected Daphne's troubles to end with Peggy's arrival: to end suddenly and completely. She would look astonished and incredulous: she would smile: she would weep a little over her Bambina and then she would never shed a tear again. Her child and she would be always together as a mother and child should be: and he, Andrea, would be their faithful friend. Such had been his simple programme, and his fateful part in it had been carried out. But apparently the complicated chords of Daphne's life could not be played to an end by a trio. Other instruments threatened to come in and disturb the melody. She spoke of a man who was guardian to her child. She did not know him, but she said that he had rights refused to her, and that she might have difficulties with him.

"I do not understand the law," said Andrea, "but I know what is just and sensible. You are the only person in the wide world who wants the child. You are her mother. Therefore you must keep her. Everyone must see it in this way. If the man comes here you will reason with him and he will depart again."

Daphne could not accept his point of view, but she did not try to change it. At any rate, to-night Peggy

was with her, thanks to Andrea, who had done what it was impossible to do. Perhaps other miracles would follow. Perhaps, as he said, no one would trouble to pursue Peggy, since no one wanted her. Daphne hung over the child before she went to bed herself, and her heart ached at the thought of the long years behind them. She could never know all that had happened. She could never picture it. She could never wholly make up. She blamed herself for her folly as she had never done before: because she had never realized before that it was her child who had paid.

CHAPTER XXII

MRS. TWISTLETON had taken down her rook rifle and shot Dingo in a spasm of rage. Directly she had done it she knew she had made a mistake. She was not sorry for Peggy or for Dingo, but she expected Victor Gerard that afternoon, and there would be explanations. It would be impossible to keep Peggy entirely out of his sight. Even if she sent the child away at a moment's notice Victor would probably go after her, and then he would hear what had happened to her dog. Mrs. Twistleton would be able to point to the tulip-bed, if she deigned to defend herself at all; but as she sat over the fire waiting for Victor she rather wished Dingo was still alive. She had known for some time that Victor had returned from Australia and was coming to Beda Close this afternoon, but she had not told Peggy. She had not even told the servants the name of the expected guest, but had ordered a room to be ready and sent the car to the station without giving any particulars: and her servants knew better than to ask. They guessed at someone she favored because of the dinner she ordered and because she dressed herself with care when she came in from her walk. She had gone out of deep mourning already and wore silvery grays and purples a great deal: and sometimes white. She had looked at herself very carefully in the glass this afternoon and felt moderately satisfied. Beyond doubt she was a handsome woman still: on the opulent side, but not grossly so. The eyes of men still turned her way and would do so for years to come. But she wished that Victor Gerard had been older. Fate had not been

kind to her in some ways. The men who courted her had never been the men by whom she felt attracted. She had married John Vyell because she did not wish to remain single: and then she had married Henry Twistleton for his money: but in neither case had she felt the least affection for her husband. Victor was different. He was very much alive and a man: with a strain of hardness in him that she respected and with a magnetic presence that she found alluring. She waited impatiently for his appearance. She listened, like a girl expecting her lover, to the sounds of his arrival in the hall. When he came into the room she realized that her ideas of him had been the faint shadows of his actual qualities. He looked browned by his long sea-voyage and in good spirits. He had the air of a prosperous man and was well dressed. But she thought he looked younger than ever, and he met her with the civil friendliness that can be disappointing. However, they sat down together near the fire, and while they had tea talked of Victor's adventures in Australia and of the want of adventure in a house like Beda Close. Mrs. Twistleton tried to find out what Victor's future plans were, but he said he had none yet. He was at a loose end again. Then he asked after Peggy, and was told that she was well but, as usual, troublesome.

"I have let this house for five years," said Mrs. Twistleton. "We are going abroad in June."

"Peggy too?"

"Certainly. I don't like schools for children of her age, so there is no alternative: unless you get married and take her."

"That's not likely," said Victor. "I'm not a marrying man."

Mrs. Twistleton was glad to hear him say so. That meant, she hoped, that he was still free: and when a man is free anything may happen to him.

"I suppose you consent to my taking her with me?" she said. "Miss Busby goes too. Their education will not be interrupted."

Victor hardly replied. He was thinking. He wanted to see Peggy before he consented to her going so far away for such a long time. He did not agree with Mrs. Twistleton about schools. He thought Peggy would be much happier at a good school than with her step-mother, and better educated. He had not seen much of Miss Busby but he had taken her measure. She was incompetent and feeble. It would give great offense if he kept Peggy in England and sent her to school, but he could not help that. He had the power to do it, and had come here to see how the land lay and to say that he would do it if necessary. He did not want a tussle with Mrs. Twistleton, but he might have to have one. No doubt there was fight in her.

"If you please, m'm," said Jordan's deferential voice close by, "Miss Busby wishes me to say that Miss Peggy is lost."

The butler had come into the room unnoticed and reached the tea-table before he spoke. When he had delivered his message he turned to Victor and asked him for his keys. It was nearly seven by this time, and from the windows the soft slanting rain could be seen veiling the hills.

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Twistleton. "Why doesn't Miss Busby look for her?"

"We have all looked everywhere, m'm: so have Pater-son and the other men outside. She has been missing since. . . ."

He stopped short and looked hard at his mistress but her eyes were veiled by her heavy eyelids. No one could read what was in her mind.

"Since when?" said Victor, who had risen to his feet: and he noticed that before the butler answered there

was an electric moment again: a moment that left out something probably bearing on Peggy's disappearance.

"Since before the schoolroom tea," said Jordan.

"Ask Miss Busby to come here," said Mrs. Twistleton impatiently: and Victor thought that the governess must have been waiting outside, for she appeared at once and Mabel came with her. Miss Busby was in a state of weeping perturbation and could only give an incoherent account of the steps she had taken for an hour past to find Peggy. She had not been alarmed at first, she said, not even when Peggy failed to come to tea.

"Of course I knew she must be dreadfully upset," she murmured. "And none of us know what has become of the body. If only we could find the body——"

"What body?" said Victor brusquely.

"Dingo's body," said Miss Busby, with an hysterical catch in her throat. "I must say, dear Mrs. Twistleton, that it upset Mabel and me to see it. No doubt it had to be done. Peggy was in one of her unmanageable moods, and I had just told her that if she did not behave herself she would not be taken to Italy. Upon which, she tore out of the room like a mad thing, with Dingo after her."

"And chivied him through and through the tulip-bed," narrated Mabel, addressing Victor rather than her mother. "The tulips are napoo, I'm afraid."

"But why did she do it?" asked Victor. "I can't see what motive she had."

"Can't you?" said Mabel, with the prim, self-satisfied air that always made Victor wish someone would shake her. "I can. She didn't want to go to Italy and leave Dingo behind: and unfortunately Miss Busby had just told her that she would be left behind if she was naughty."

"I thought it would have a good effect, not a bad one," wept Miss Busby, glancing with appeal at the

sphinx-like face of her employer. "But I was horrified when I saw what she was doing."

"You went to the window?" said Victor, trying to make out what had happened.

"Yes," said Miss Busby. "Mabel and I were both at the window, but we turned away and sat down. We were a little unstrung."

"I was quite unstrung," said Mabel, smoothing a fold of her white frock. "I was not fond of Dingo because he killed poor Carlo, but I didn't like seeing him wriggle after he was shot. It was unpleasant."

"He was shot!" said Victor.

There was a momentary silence in the room. Mrs. Twistleton did not raise her eyelids or relax the obstinate set of her mouth: nor did she speak yet.

"Was he shot from the garden or the house?" asked Victor.

Mrs. Twistleton raised her eyes then and met his steadily.

"He was shot from the house," she said. "He had become impossible. Besides, we could not take him to Italy, and I don't care to leave animals with strangers. You never know how they will be treated. I am surprised, Miss Busby, that you waited so long before you made inquiries about Peggy. Didn't you see which direction she took when she left the front of the house?"

But Miss Busby had seen nothing and knew nothing. She left the room tearfully, followed by Mabel.

"I'll have a look round the place myself," said Victor, when they had gone.

"I'm not in the least uneasy," said Mrs. Twistleton. "The child can't be far off and she knows her way everywhere. She will come back when she gets hungry."

"I wish I could feel sure of that," said Victor.

"She has done the same thing before. She got as far as the top of the house once and we had search parties

out looking for her. She was smaller then, and her father got anxious."

"But what was she doing?"

"Trying to run away. Have you never heard of children doing that? Didn't you ever do it yourself?"

Mrs. Twistleton was plausible but Victor did not feel persuaded by her. It was pouring rain now, and she looked at him with derisive amusement when he insisted on going out into such weather: nor did she seem inclined to take any active steps to find Peggy.

"I expect you'll come across her if you do go out," she said. "Look in the orchard houses. She sometimes hides in one of them for warmth. At least, she used to when she knew where to find the keys. I believe Paterson takes them home with him ever since she left the door open and killed all the peach blossom."

Victor went out into the rain and liked it better to-night than breathing the same air as Mrs. Twistleton. He had kept a guard on his tongue so far, but it had not been easy. Her callousness horrified him, and he felt anxious and angry. Peggy must be somewhere near, dead or alive: but how was he or anyone else to find her? He went straight to Low Tarn and almost at once saw the little newly-made grave with the spade thrown down beside it. He hallooed to Peggy then, and was answered by Paterson and Lloyd, the new chauffeur, on the lookout too. They knew what had happened and said what Victor had not allowed himself to say or even to think. Nothing could be done to-night, but to-morrow the tarn must be dragged and then the lake. Meanwhile none of the men on the property would go to bed. They and others would spend the night searching on the fells. Victor said he would join them: but before doing so he went back to the house and saw Mrs. Twistleton again. She was still sitting over the fire with a book in her hands.

"I think we ought to 'phone to every house near and to the police at Senwick," he said.

"We'll do that to-morrow," said she.

"The sooner the better."

"I don't agree with you. She will be back before it is dark, and we shall have made a fuss about nothing. It's time now to get ready for dinner."

"I'm not coming to dinner," said Victor.

She stared at him.

"I'm going to search the fells," he explained; "about a dozen of us are going in different directions."

"But you must have something to eat."

"Jordan will give me something to take with me. I don't want to lose any time. By the way . . . I found the grave."

"What grave?"

"Dingo's. Peggy buried him near Low Tarn."

Mrs. Twistleton's eyelids fluttered slightly but she did not raise her eyes just then.

"After all," she said, "Dingo was only a dog. I don't remember that you were much disturbed when he killed Carlo. On the contrary. You persuaded my husband not to have him destroyed."

"It was not Mr. Twistleton who meant to destroy him," said Victor, who had a rough tongue at times when he was angry.

"And Peggy had run away then," continued Mrs. Twistleton. "Don't you remember? You brought her back."

"I wonder if she can have taken that same path," said Victor. "She may be at the Hallinwater Hotel by this time. But what can she expect to do there? She has no money, I suppose?"

"None at all," said Mrs. Twistleton. "But natures like hers don't look ahead. They run headlong . . . as her mother did."

"You knew her mother?"

"Very well."

She rose lazily from her chair and looked at the young man still standing restlessly beside the fire.

"You had better have some dinner," she said, and her voice and manner reminded Victor of a cat that purrs and rubs itself against you when it is in a friendly mood. "If eleven others are looking for the tiresome child. . . ."

But as it happened, Victor did not like cats and did like Peggy. Mrs. Twistleton's cajolery made no appeal to him, and without much care for her feelings he said again that he was going out at once and would stay out all night if necessary. However, rather against his own judgment, he agreed to wait till the morning before stirring up the police.

In country places news flies from mouth to mouth and spreads quickly: so by next day everyone knew that Peggy Twistleton was missing from Beda Close. While Victor sat at breakfast with Mrs. Twistleton the news came through on the 'phone that she had been seen on the steamer with a strange foreign-looking man who carried a violin and again at the station waiting for the London train. Victor spent the morning at Senwick trying to communicate with the London police and put them on the child's trail. When he went back to Beda Close he had achieved nothing, and was in the mood to curse himself for not having done last night that which he had left to do this morning. If he had telegraphed a description. . . .

"How could you?" said Mrs. Twistleton. "You can't describe a person whose very existence is unknown to you. Naturally we all thought she had done what she had done before and was on the fells. It never struck me that her mother had sent someone to kidnap her."

"What!" shouted Victor.

"That is what has happened. The elder Miss Pinkney

has been here. She traveled with the man. He asked her to point out the house and told her that he lived at Siena. Daphne went there more than a year ago. I generally hear where she is because poor Geoffrey Coverdale's brother lives in Manchester and sometimes, when I go there I see him. I'm surprised really that Daphne never did this before."

"But she has no rights," said Victor, who was relieved to find that Peggy was alive but felt uncertain what to do next.

"None whatever," said Mrs. Twistleton.

CHAPTER XXIII

PEGGY had been nearly a month in Siena and Daphne was beginning to hope that no one would come after her. At first she had been inclined to go into hiding with the child, and if possible cover her tracks. But it is notoriously difficult to hide unless you can break suddenly and completely with all the circumstances, postal and financial, on which your daily life depends. Besides, Peggy needed rest and careful treatment: and she needed clothes: and clothes take time. Daphne knew exactly how to dress her because she had watched other children so much when she was thinking of her own child. The great heat had come already although it was only May, and Peggy must have the daintiest white underwear procurable as well as a great many little washing frocks, some all white and some embroidered or printed with a dash of color. A few were bought ready-made but others were ordered, and some Daphne embroidered herself at home. Andrea complained that she did not spend as much time as usual on her music now, but in reality he reaped his reward when he sat with Daphne and Peggy in the little garden and watched Daphne embroidering in white on blue linen for her child.

"I want a blue frock as well as the white ones," Peggy had said. "Celia Asygarth had a blue frock embroidered with white. Her mother made it, and it was lovely. Do you think you could make me one?"

Of course Daphne could. There was nothing Peggy wanted that she should not have if Daphne could get it for her. She must be dressed better than anyone else

and tended more carefully and enveloped with a yet deeper affection than other children: and even then nothing could make up for the past years. Daphne hung over her child with such burning affection and regret that for the time she lost her balance a little and forgot that her business was to educate as well as to cherish. Her possession was still insecure, her indignation increasing as day by day the picture of Peggy's life at Beda Close became fuller and more hateful. She felt as one does who fiercely takes the beloved in his arms, proposing to fight death with affection and win. She could do nothing yet but love Peggy and tenderly indulge her, for the child still had the scared look in her eyes at times that Daphne could not bear to see. But you would hardly have known her now for the little ragamuffin who had arrived with Andrea a month ago. Her cough was much better, her face had filled out already, and she went well and cleanly clad. The earth was hers and everyone in her mother's household was her slave. In the morning old Giuditta brought her her bath and one of her new frocks, murmuring pretty Italian greetings as she did so that Peggy was beginning to understand and return. When she was dressed she had breakfast in the big, cool dining-room with her mother: a delicious breakfast of eggs and honey and bread-and-butter. Then they went out together, and though the shops and the dressmakers were rather dull, the streets were always entertaining. There were the people who hawked salted pumpkin-seeds in three tiered baskets lined with green paper. Daphne did not want Peggy to eat the seeds because of her cough, but she let her buy some once just to try. Peggy had watched men, women and children eat them the other day when she had been sitting under the trees in the Lizza. They just split them and then they ate the seed inside. Peggy got one of her pockets full for a penny and before long had filled the other pocket with

ripe cherries bought from an old man with a big barrow. Daphne had tried to get her past the barrow and reminded her that there were cherries at home on their own tree. But Peggy pointed out that those on the barrow were a slightly different shade of red and might have a different flavor. So Daphne bought her some but told her not to stain her clean frock. Unfortunately by the time they got to the dressmaker's a few of the cherries that must have been over-ripe had made a stain: but no one scolded or seemed to mind. The dressmaker said that by great good fortune she had an iron hot and that her sister should wash out the stain and iron the washed bit while Peggy tried-on. She also produced a plate for the cherries while Peggy ate them and cracked her pumpkin-seeds. Trying-on was a tiresome process and made you feel fidgety and inclined to cough: or perhaps it was the pumpkin-seeds that made you cough.

"I'm thirsty," said Peggy, when they got into the streets again. "I should like some raspberry syrup and water."

So Daphne took her into Mosca's tea-rooms and let her have a glass of raspberry syrup and water with grated ice in it. Peggy sucked it through a straw and did not ask for cakes with it, because if you eat cakes at eleven you are not as hungry as you ought to be at lunch, and that seems to worry everyone. Even old Giuditta looked worried and threw up her hands when Peggy did not eat enough. The streets in Siena were not a bit like the streets in Manchester or Senwick. They were all paved and had no sidewalks. The houses were very high and old, and many of them had been palaces, but were now let out in flats or used as business premises. The street in which Mosca had his shop was generally crowded and noisy, because carriages and motor-cars went through it and country carts drawn by three mules. Usually a cart had one big mule and two smaller ones,

and as they ambled along they munched green-stuff contained in nosebags made of rope.

"Could we have a cart with three mules?" said Peggy. "I should like one very much. I love mules. They have such friendly sly eyes. I should like a cart with a big square hamper behind that you can sit in."

Daphne tried to explain that only peasants used such carts and was glad when a girl carrying green parrakeets in a wicker cage diverted Peggy's attention: because she knew that if the child made up her mind that she wanted mules she would probably end by getting them. But for the moment the parrakeets sufficed. Peggy explained that Andrea had told her about them and would doubtlessly buy her two were he on the spot, and that if you let an opportunity slip it may never come again. So they went back to the flat by shady, quiet by-streets carrying the wicker cage, and Peggy could not sleep that afternoon because she was thinking so hard about the birds. They were not like Dingo. They could not go for walks with her and love her as he had done. In fact, they were rather stupid compared with him, but they were alive and very beautiful.

"I don't want another dog just yet," she explained to her mother. "I should like the mules and I like the birds. But I could not have had another dog when Dingo was alive. It would have hurt his feelings: and for all I know it might hurt them now that he is dead. I wish you had known Dingo and I wish you knew Mr. Gerard."

Daphne did not tell Peggy so, but she fervently hoped that she would never know Mr. Gerard. He had been kind to the child, but he had rights over her that the mother did not possess, and all through the winter he had deserted his post. It had been touch and go with Peggy. The doctors said so. Another chill, a little more neglect would have finished her. She still needed the

utmost care and would do so for a long time. Later on Daphne meant to take her to one of the summer places in the Apennines, but not until after the Palio in July. She wanted her own doctor to watch the child for some weeks longer, and Peggy, having heard tell of the Palio, must needs see it. She was a very intelligent child, Daphne thought, but she was ignorant and had been badly taught. She was picking up Italian by ear, as children do, and she was learning a little about the history of Siena through the stories Andrea and Daphne told her. She was taken to the Duomo one Sunday to see rows and rows of children younger than herself dressed like brides for their confirmation, and as they came away they met the *contrada* of the Oca, and for the first time saw the *Alfieri* twirling their flags about their bodies and hurling them high into the air and catching them again with skill. After that, whenever she heard the drum in the street, she was in a fever to be out with it, watching the flag-throwers and the medieval dresses worn by the pages. It was explained to her that every Sunday one of the seventeen wards of Siena sent its representatives to parade the streets, and she got to know the different emblems by which they were known, and to hope that the *oca* or the *istrice* would win, because she was an *istrice* by right of domicile and Uncle Andrea was an *oca*. She told her mother that she never wanted to go to England again where children were sent to bed early and missed all the fun. Daphne was letting her sleep for some hours in the afternoon and then go out late at night, as Italian children do, because when the great heat came Peggy drooped at once. She could not stand the fierce glare of the sun and the stuffy air in the narrow, sun-baked streets, but she revived after dinner when Andrea and Daphne took her to the Lizza to see the fireflies. She had seen a glow-worm at home now and again, but she had never seen fireflies darting

amongst the plants and bushes, specks of brilliant light that made her think of fairies. There were a few in their own garden sometimes, but there were more on the Lizza. Besides, everyone was on the Lizza, and if you were lucky you might meet Lydia Bianchi, who was just your age and liked ices. There were ices to be had late at night, and Uncle Andrea said they did no harm. Children much younger than Peggy were to be seen there enjoying them.

"You had soup and chicken and Giuditta's cream cakes not long ago," said Daphne one night when Andrea had not been able to go with them. "I don't think you can really need ices now."

"Not ices," said Peggy. "Only one. It's a thirsty night: and there is Lydia . . . there in a pink frock. Shall I ask her to come with us? She says *gelato* is a *diletto* for her, and she only has them sometimes. When her brother, who is in the navy, comes home he takes her to Meucci's and gives her a *grande* that costs 1.60. Shall we go to there now? It's quite near really, and I've had no walk to-day, and afterwards we will go to the Fortezza because you like the view. It has been so hot all day, and now it is cool. I'm very fond of Lydia, especially when something doesn't please her and she croons about it to her mother. She has such a dear little funny voice and I often understand what she says now."

It really seemed as if ices did not hurt Peggy even late at night, so why should she not have them? and why should she not invite Lydia to come to Meucci's too, since Lydia was a charming child, the daughter of Daphne's doctor? He was in the Lizza to-night with his wife, and he only smiled and bowed when Daphne spoke to him, and let Lydia go. Daphne supposed that Peggy was being rather spoiled, but wasn't it good for her after having been harshly treated for so long? It must be good for her to be happy, and she was naturally

a sweet-tempered child, never made fractious or selfish by indulgence. So the two children went to Meucci's with Daphne and had big ices half vanilla and half chocolate: and then they all went back to the Lizza, leaving Lydia with her parents on the way. The little park was full of people still, but when Daphne and Peggy got to the point of the fortress and sat down on the stone seat there they had it to themselves. Across intensely cultivated land they looked at Siena on her hills, her ancient towers and houses huddling up to the foot of the Duomo that is her glory and her crown. In the foreground, stark and plain, rose the huge church of S. Domenica and to the right the cupola of the Carmine. The Mangia Tower was hidden, but they had seen it a moment ago clear against the deep starlit sky. The city was lighted now and looked aglow. Beyond, to westwards, were the mountains, with cypresses, some in groups, some singly, like sentinels on the way to the mountains. Everywhere in the undulating open country on which the sun poured day by day there were olive trees and vines: while the sky behind Daphne was still flushed with red, a promise of fine weather for the morrow.

"Shall we live here for ever and for ever till we die," said Peggy, "and come here every night and look at the view?"

Her thin little body had snuggled close up to her mother and Daphne had put one arm round her.

"Are you sure you are warm?" she said anxiously. "You mustn't get a chill."

"I'm as warm as pie," said Peggy, borrowing a simile from Mrs. Butterfield, "especially when your arm is round me. How happy we are, Mummy, aren't we? Tell me about the place we are going to after the Palio. Will there be any children there?"

"Ever so many," said Daphne, becoming conscious at the same moment that they were not to be by themselves

any longer. Someone was approaching rapidly, someone who walked with a quick, firm step. As he came into sight she saw him clearly enough to make out that he was probably an Englishman and young. He walked as her countrymen did, and she thought he was dressed as they were, in tweeds. He came to a halt opposite them and looked hard at Peggy.

"Well, Peggy!" he said, and before Daphne had realized what was happening Peggy had given a scream of delight, slipped to her feet, and was apparently making a determined effort to put herself into the man's arms.

"It's Mr. Gerard!" she cried aloud. "Mummy, it's Mr. Gerard!"

Daphne neither moved nor spoke. She sat there quietly, the chill of misery within her, sick at heart and afraid.

"May I sit down?" said Victor, and Daphne liked his voice and his manner: both were courteous and kind. She could not see him very clearly in the half-light, nor could he see much of her, but he got an impression from her frozen silence. His task was going to be a hateful one, but of course he must carry it through.

"I'll sit between you and talk to you both," said Peggy, "or would you rather talk to each other? I thought I was never going to see you again, Mr. Gerard. They told me you had gone to Australia."

"I did go there, but I've come back," said Victor.

"Why have you come to Siena?"

"I've come for you."

"But you can't have me. Mummy wants me. Don't you, Mummy? You could have had me a long time ago, and then you said you didn't want me. Don't you remember?"

"I don't particularly want you now, but I'm afraid you'll have to come with me," said Victor.

CHAPTER XXIV

VICTOR knew that Daphne had left her husband for a younger man and in doing so had deserted her child. That was all he knew about her, and he judged her hardly. He had more respect, he thought, for women of Mrs. Warren's profession than for those women who undertake duties and lightly throw them over. If there had been no child he could have forgiven her, but he understood that Peggy's little life had been a scramble and that she did not get on well with her step-mother, to whom, nevertheless, he must now insist on her returning. He hated the whole business, but it had to be carried through, and he did not expect hearts to be broken. Peggy must do as she was told, and a woman who leaves her child for her lover must be heartless or capricious: probably capricious. This sudden abduction of the child after quiescence for nearly six years looked like it.

He could not see her clearly and she had not spoken yet. She sat there as if she was frozen, holding the child tightly to her and looking not at him but at the lighted city on its hills. He sat down on the other side of Peggy and spoke to Daphne.

"Peggy has told you who I am," he began.

"Yes," she said. Her voice trembled a little but it was sweet and low: a voice that stole upon you and was not what he expected. A woman who first marries an old man for his money and then runs away with a young one has no business with such a voice. Her speech, like her conduct, should have been hard. He would

have known how to deal with that. He could be hard when people deserved it.

"We must talk things over," he said.

"Yes," said she again; "but not here. If you will come and see me to-morrow I shall be glad to talk to you."

She rose as she spoke, still keeping Peggy with her. Victor felt himself gently dismissed, and asked himself if he was a fool to allow it.

"You will be there, to-morrow?" he said, keeping at her side.

She bowed in assent but did not speak again: while Peggy caught his hand and chattered to him.

"I'm very happy here," she said; "I couldn't possibly go away, not even with you, Mr. Gerard. My cough is better. It was very bad all the winter after you went to Australia. I'm learning Italian and I have two green love-birds in a wicker cage. We have a cherry-tree in our garden and I gather the cherries myself: I'll get you some when you come to see us. Do you know that Dingo is dead? . . . Poor Dingo! Uncle Andrea and I buried him and Uncle Andrea played a funeral march over his grave. *She* killed him just as she killed Ada Dixon's kitten. I told you she liked killing things, but you wouldn't believe it. Mummy won't let me talk about her now and says I must forget. I do try, but I can't ever forget Dingo. When he had been shot he looked at me, and nearly every night when I'm going to sleep I see his eyes. I believe he thought I had done it. I shouldn't mind so much if I was quite sure he knew now."

"What time shall I come to-morrow?" said Victor to Daphne over Peggy's head.

"Come early," she said; and then, after a moment's consideration, she added, "Will you come in now?"

"Yes, I will," said Victor, and walked with them

through the city to Daphne's flat. The chief streets were crowded at this hour of the night, but Daphne led them by quiet streets, under ancient archways, dimly lighted and reminiscent of tragedies played in their shadow long ago. She opened the door of her flat herself, but old Giuditta appeared at once and took Peggy off to bed. Daphne went into her sitting-room and turned on the light. Then Victor saw her more plainly than he had done yet, for as they had walked through the city she had turned her face from him. He saw now that she looked young and innocent and most unhappy. He wished she had been a different woman or else that he had never undertaken to fight her. What a fool he had been! However, he was not the law of England or even its recognized interpreter: nor was he in any sense responsible for the law. He could make that clear, he supposed. What a jolly room this was! Spacious, dignified, not crammed with stuff no one wants. Victor hated rooms that were over-full. He had taken a seat opposite Daphne and was watching her. She had thrown off a light cloak she had worn out of doors and he saw that her frock was blue, the blue of sapphires. Her eyes were tragic to-night, but she was trying hard for composure. She had beautiful slim white hands that were loosely folded in her lap: but they betrayed more than she wished them to betray at times. So did her bare slender throat when she tried to speak. He hoped she would not cry: but she did not look like a woman who cried.

"You want to take my child from me?" she began.

"I'm sorry, but I must," said Victor.

"Why must you?"

"It's the law."

"I don't care *that* for the law," said Daphne, and snapped her fingers. She spoke with fire, too, and her eyes began to look like Peggy's.

"Women never do," said Victor tritely.

"A law that tears a child from its mother is a bad one."

That was like a woman too, thought Victor: to talk of a child being torn from its mother when, in this case at any rate, the mother had walked out of the house, leaving her child behind.

"Laws have to be obeyed," he pointed out.

"I suppose you think I deserted Peggy?" she said, starting on a new talk: one he had no desire to follow. He was not there to act as her judge but only to discharge the duties laid upon him by Mr. Twistleton's will.

"I was away at the time," he began with some embarrassment.

"I went back to her," said Daphne. "I went back to her: but my husband would not let me in."

Victor did not quite know what to say, so he looked thoughtful and said nothing. It was possible that Mr. Twistleton had behaved harshly and unjustly, but it was possible too that he had felt himself irreparably aggrieved. He remembered what Mrs. Butterfield had told him about Daphne standing in the snow outside the house and begging in vain to have her child: and that picture took on different colors now that he stood face to face with her, receiving the multiple and complicated impressions only to be given in personal intercourse.

"You know that she can come back to you when she is sixteen?" he said, and was aware at once that what he said sounded hollow and foolish.

"What do you propose to do with her if I let her go?" she asked.

"There is no 'if' about it," said Victor, who was getting rather angry. "I'm afraid you'll have to let her go."

"Who will make me?"

"I'm here for that purpose, and I assure you that I have forces behind me——"

"I asked you what you proposed to do with her."

"Till she is sixteen she must live with Mrs. Twistleton as her father arranged. I can't take her because I am not married."

"It is plain that you are not married," said Daphne.

"Why is it plain?"

"Because you show a distressing ignorance of children. Have you any idea of the state Peggy was in when Andrea Sarzoni brought her here?"

"Who is Andrea Sarzoni?" said Victor. "I know that Peggy was enticed from home by an odd-looking foreigner who would have been arrested in London if I had had my way and telegraphed to the police at once. It would have saved us all a great deal of trouble and anxiety and Mr. What's-his-name would have got what he richly deserved." Victor felt that he was speaking over-roughly, but he did not care. His temper, which always ignited easily, was near explosion.

"Signor Sarzoni is a friend of mine," said Daphne, and by the quietness of her manner had the best of it. "He knew that I was breaking my heart for Peggy, so he went to England and fetched her. It was a wonderful thing to do. I don't know how I can ever repay him."

"It was rather a useless thing to do," said Victor. "A country like England does not allow its laws to be evaded quite so easily."

"Do you know much of Mrs. Twistleton?" asked Daphne.

"I know her."

"Do you know that she has ill-treated Peggy? Do you know that the child has been beaten and half-starved, neglected when she was ill, treated with persistent unkindness and dislike? Have you never noticed the scared look in her eyes—what you might expect to see in the eyes of a slum child reared in a garret

with drunkards who ill-use it? She has been ill-used for years. She was nothing but skin and bone when she came to me. Her poor little face was old and wizened: and she is *my* child."

"She was Mr. Twistleton's child too," said Victor. "He had a father's rights and made provisions for her that must be carried out. Even if I agreed with you I have no power to alter them."

"You are Peggy's guardian, she tells me. You have rights over her that I, her mother, have not."

"I am co-guardian with Mrs. Twistleton."

"Have you no power to take her away from Mrs. Twistleton?"

"Yes, I have," said Victor unwillingly; "but I am not going to do it unless I see real need."

Daphne looked at him in horror and amazement. She got up suddenly from her chair and went towards the window that gave on the little garden. By the light of the stars and of the rising moon she could see the cherry-tree into which Peggy had climbed that day and the tiled terrace on which they had sat together a few hours ago. She did not know what to say next. This man her husband had set over his child seemed to her as hard as steel and as inflexible. He had been kind to Peggy, but she saw no kindness in him now. She thought she saw dislike. He was probably biased against her, and when she had spoken with heat of Peggy's abominable treatment his face had hardened as men's faces do harden when women they distrust clamor and exaggerate. Probably he believed in Mrs. Twistleton. Possibly he was her admirer. He looked younger than Rhoda, who must be nearly forty by now: but she had probably kept her youth. Those snake women did.

"You really mean that I have no rights over Peggy although she is my child?" she said, turning to Victor again, who by this time had risen too.

"Surely you have known that for the last six years," said he.

"I knew it while her father was alive . . . but he is dead. . . . Now there is no one but me . . . no one at all. I tell you she shall not go back to that woman."

"I tell you she shall."

Daphne's hands were clenched now as she faced Victor, with little hope of moving him, but in such stress of mind that she fought on as a man trapped behind a door he cannot open shakes it though he knows it is in vain.

"She will die if she does," she said.

"She will not die. Peggy was ill in the autumn and was thoroughly well looked after. I'm going to keep an eye on her now, and if I'm not satisfied I shall send her to a good school."

Daphne laughed.

"I amuse you!" observed Victor.

"What is Peggy to you, or you to Peggy? How old are you? About thirty-three or four, I suppose. What do you understand about the hourly care a child as delicate as Peggy requires? Can you watch when she is tired and see that she rests? Can you see that she is dressed as the weather changes . . . that she never gets over-heated or chilled? Can you give her the tenderness she has missed all these years? Do you think her step-mother will do it? That most evil woman."

"I'm not sure that I believe much in people being evil," said Victor, speaking easily because Daphne made him feel rather wretched and he wanted to end the interview on a less agitated plane. He liked the way she stood up to him and he liked her, but he had his duty to do. It was an unpleasant one, but that could not be helped.

"People are often stupid," he conceded, and saw that

her beautiful eyes could have an ironical gleam in them that gave them savor.

"But you must have learned a little history at school," she murmured, "and you must sometimes see the papers. Every day, every hour, evil things are done and come to light. More is done that never comes to light at all. I tell you that Mrs. Twistleton is evil. She turned my husband against me. . . ."

"How do you know?"

"I know her. But never mind about that. Peggy——"

"I will leave Peggy here to-night if you will give me your word of honor that I shall find her here to-morrow," said Victor. "To-morrow I'm afraid I must take her away."

"To-night! To-morrow!" Victor thought the woman was going to fall in a heap at his feet, but she steadied herself by an effort. What it cost he could see by the change in her face. He felt like an executioner, and wished more than ever that he had never come.

"She is not fit to travel," said Daphne, when she could speak.

"She is not going to travel . . . at any rate, not yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Twistleton is in Siena . . . at the Royal."

It was like seeing dead gray ashes where a moment ago you saw a glowing fire: and that scared look in her eye! Why was it in her eyes as it had been in Peggy's? She was not a child who had been beaten and generally ill-treated . . . if those stories were all true. He must keep a better watch on the child if he could, and it was not going to be easy.

"After all," he argued aloud, "Mr. Twistleton must have known what he was about and he left Peggy in her step-mother's care."

"Why has Mrs. Twistleton come to Siena?" said Daphne.

"She was coming to Italy in any case . . . coming with both children and Miss Busby, their governess, for some time. When we found that Peggy had been kidnapped and brought here we decided to come after her. You know, it wasn't playing the game, Mrs. Coverdale, to carry off the child like that and leave no word. How were we to know she was not drowned or lost on the fells? We spent the night searching for her."

"You mean that you feared she might have drowned herself after Mrs. Twistleton shot her dog? I don't think English children commit suicide even when they are hard pressed. I can't remember a case of it."

Daphne spoke with self-possession and her manner told Victor many things that her lips left unsaid at the moment. No doubt she had Peggy's complete confidence and knew a great deal about the child's life that he did not. Possibly she was right in her judgment of Mrs. Twistleton, but he could not act on it without further evidence. At present he had not much to go on except Peggy's chance remarks about her step-mother, and Peggy was a fanciful, difficult child. The killing of Dingo had been an act of brutality, but he knew men who could have done it in a fit of temper, given similar provocation. There were probably faults on both sides.

"You give me your promise, Mrs. Coverdale?" he said. "Peggy will be here in the morning?"

"She should not be if I could help it," said Daphne. "But what can I do?"

Victor held out his hand, but Daphne shrank from him and refused to take it.

"You won't shake hands?"

"I can't."

"Oh, very well," he said, and turned on his heel.

She did not recall him, but stood as he had left her till he closed the door. Then she broke down.

CHAPTER XXV

“WHEN is my dear Mr. Gerard coming again?” said Peggy at breakfast next day.

“He will probably come this morning,” said Daphne. She had not slept all night, and though her bath had refreshed her, she looked worn with her vigil. Even Peggy noticed that something was wrong.

“Have you been crying, Mummy?” she said. “Your eyes look as if you had been crying. They’ve gone back in your head and the lids are red. Uncle Andrea said that when I came you would never cry.”

“We had an appointment with the dressmaker this morning,” said Daphne, with a little catch in her breath. “I must send her word that we cannot come.”

It was like some brutal disaster in their lives, rending them asunder and upsetting all their plans. The engagements they had made could not be carried out, even the clothes Daphne had ordered for the child might never be finished. Probably they would not be accepted by her legal guardians.

“Why can’t we go to the dressmaker?” asked Peggy.

“Because Mr. Gerard is coming here.”

Peggy, who had finished her breakfast, executed a hop, skip and a dance expressive of unusual joy and went to look at her love-birds who were making love to each other in the window.

“They are very pretty,” she said, “but they are rather dull. They would be more amusing if they sometimes had a quarrel. Can I go and gather some cherries for Mr. Gerard, Mummy? I told him I would.”

"Don't tumble out of the tree, then," said Daphne, and wondered what would happen if Peggy did tumble and hurt herself seriously and was kept here for weeks or months. She supposed it would be a reprieve.

"Have you told her?" said Victor directly he arrived.

"Certainly not," said Daphne. "I will leave that to you."

She spoke with spirit, but he could see that she had been crying her eyes out and had probably not slept. She was dressed with freshness and precision, and he liked that in her. By the morning light she was a lovely woman and if the face is an index to the mind she was a good one. He wished he had come over her threshold as a friend and not as a foe. Here came Peggy helter-skelter, bringing him cherries and kisses and a welcome. He supposed she would set up a howl when he told her why he had come: and hate him. Better get it over quickly.

"Are you ready, Peggy?" he said, when the first raptures had subsided.

"What for?" asked Peggy, her hand stroking his tweed sleeve affectionately.

"To come with me."

"Where to?"

"To the Hotel Royal."

"Are you staying there?"

"Yes."

"I'll come if Mummy does," said Peggy.

There was a momentary silence, and then Victor spoke with more authority.

"Go and put your hat on," he said: and Peggy went, after glancing at her mother, who made a sign of assent.

"Are you going to take her without telling her . . . into a trap?" said Daphne bitterly.

"Yes, I am," said Victor with decision. "If there is to be a fuss I'll have it there and not here."

"Do you expect me to bid her good-by as if I was letting her go for half an hour?"

"Yes, I do."

Daphne went out of the room before he could attempt to stop her, and when the door opened again Peggy came in by herself.

"I'm ready," she announced.

"Have you said good-by to your mother?" he asked, wondering what had happened.

"Yes," said Peggy cheerfully. "She came in and said good-by to me. I'm afraid she has crumpled my frock rather, because she squeezed me so hard. We said good-by for ever so long. Did you think I took all that time to put on a hat? Mummy isn't coming to say good-by to you and she won't come with us. It would be a pity if she didn't like you, wouldn't it, as I like you so much. I wonder why she was crying when she bid me good-by."

"Come along," said Victor, not quite sure whether he felt most like Judas Iscariot or one of the ruffians he had seen in a picture yesterday of the Slaughter of the Innocents. But he could not carry Peggy howling through the streets of Siena, and presumably she would howl when she was confronted with her step-mother again. He had not wanted Mrs. Twistleton to come, but she said she had always wished to see the city and did not intend to avoid it because Daphne happened to live there. They need not meet. Also, she pointed out that it would save Victor inconvenience. If she was not there to receive Peggy he would have to travel with the child: and children were troublesome traveling companions. Victor did not doubt that. They were troublesome creatures at all times. Here was this one at his side . . . no end to the trouble she caused . . . and the heartbreak. He would like to see Daphne again, if only to assure her that Peggy was well and happy: but

would he be received, and would Peggy be well and happy?

Victor had kept hold of the child's hand because now that he had got her he did not intend to let her go, but they were not on the way to the Royal. He had a good hour to spare before lunch-time, and he had not seen the Duomo yet: so he had proposed to Peggy that they should go there together.

"I should like that," said Peggy, "and if you like I will tell you all about it. But perhaps you know more than I do," she added, remembering her manners. However, Victor assured her that he knew nothing at all about the Duomo and that he had not brought his guide-book with him, and that he was ready to be instructed by Peggy to the limit of her capacity.

"You do use long words," said Peggy, looking up at his profile and giving his hand a little squeeze that still further depressed his spirits. "You see this great arch that we are under now? They began that in 1339 because they wanted their cathedral to be bigger than anyone else's, because they are a very vain people. Dante says so. But the plague came and killed most of them and they never had money enough afterwards. Would you like to go in at the side? No, we must look at the façade first and I will tell you about that and about the Campanile. I've seen the Leaning Tower at Pisa and been up to the top of it. Did you ever do that?"

"We came by Pisa," said Victor heedlessly. "I didn't go to the top of the tower. The heat was terrific."

"Why do you say 'we'?" inquired Peggy. "Who was with you?"

They were sitting now on the long stone seat beneath the hospital facing the façade of the Duomo. They were in shade, but the sun beat upon the glistening front of the cathedral so that it looked as white and shining as a giant wedding-cake and as new. The broad space

between the hospital and the bottom of the cathedral steps was nearly empty at this hour. One or two beggars loitered in shady spots on the look-out for likely victims, at intervals a motor-lorry thundered past, and on the stone seat itself two seedy-looking men were enjoying a morning nap. There were so few people about that each one became noticeable, and as Victor got up to go into the cathedral he saw Miss Busby and Mabel coming with a dragging step their way. He had made his move because he did not mean to answer Peggy's question yet, but the inopportune appearance of the governess and the elder girl answered it for him. At the moment he had let Peggy's hand go, but he saw her stop stock still and turn first red with surprise and then pale with fright. She looked at him.

"Did you know they were here?" she said.

"Yes, I knew," said he. "Come along, Peggy. We won't wait for them. We'll go in by ourselves."

"Is *she* here?"

"Speak properly," he ordered rather roughly, for like other men he was apt to use the rough edge to his tongue when the situation confounded and annoyed him. "Yes, Mrs. Twistleton is here."

"At the Royal?"

"Yes."

"Then I won't go there. Thank you very much for asking me, Mr. Gerard, but I must go back to Mummy now. I know the way."

She took a step in the right direction, but of course Victor had her by the wrist in a moment, and though she tried to get away it did not take her long to realize that his hand was like a ring of iron against her puny efforts. So she burst into tears.

"Come into the cathedral before they get up to us," said Victor, for Miss Busby and Mabel were still crawling slowly across another part of the sun-baked piazza and

had not noticed them yet. "I want to talk to you: but you must leave off crying."

"I don't want to go into the Duomo. I want to go home," wailed Peggy.

"You must do as you are told," said Victor, and thanked his stars that the scene was empty: because Peggy's sobs were getting louder as he made her walk with him to the cathedral steps.

"I want to go home. Let me go home," she said again and again, until he lost his patience.

"You are not going home," he said, "and if you howl like that I won't take you into the cathedral. Are you going to behave yourself?"

"No," said Peggy: and kicked him. They were on the top of the steps by that time, close to the doors, and he saw that Miss Busby and Mabel were making for the stone seat and would soon turn round and see them. So he pushed the child through the door and spoke to her severely.

"Be quiet!" he said. "I'm very angry with you," and his voice carried conviction. He had never spoken to her like that before, and when he did all the tumult within her seemed to die away beneath the weight of his displeasure. Besides, the sudden change from the garish sun outside into the cold, quiet darkness of the cathedral had its effect. The great striped columns imposed themselves: the hush of the place made any personal noise unseemly. At the far end of the immense nave she could see the bronze tabernacle and the angels of bronze guarding it. Just beyond where they stood, through brimming eyes, she saw one of the fonts she had meant to tell him about. Though she was crying she could see the marble tortoise that had made her wish for a live tortoise of her own: but Victor did not stay near them. He led her to a marble seat near the Cappella del Voto and they sat down there together, he still hold-

ing her hand. They had the huge place almost to themselves for the time. One old woman was praying near the pulpit and another in front of the Cappella del Voto, but otherwise there was not one to be seen.

"You must try to be sensible and understand what I say to you," began Victor, speaking in a low voice. "Your father left you in my care and in Mrs. Twistleton's."

A violent shudder convulsed Peggy's frame when her step-mother was mentioned, and Victor went on speaking rather hurriedly and in a harder tone than he would have used if he had not thought hardness the best tonic for her unloosed emotions.

"You know, don't you, that you cannot live with your mother till you are sixteen?"

"But I did live with her," said Peggy.

Victor lost his patience again, which was wrong of him: but he was not used to children.

"You're not going to live with her a day longer," he said. "It was very naughty of you to run away as you did."

"I'd run away again if I could," sobbed Peggy.

"I've no doubt you would: but I'll take care you don't. You're coming with me now, and you'd better behave yourself. You may not think it, but I can be extraordinarily disagreeable when people annoy me."

"I suppose you mean I mustn't kick you again," said Peggy. "I wouldn't have done it if I'd had time to think: but I wanted with all my might and main to get away."

"Yes, I know there are extenuating circumstances," said Victor. "Otherwise. . . ."

His voice was kind again and his eyes had the twinkle in them that made Peggy watch them and like them. His hand closed on hers strongly and with promise: as much as to say that he had come back now and would take care of her.

"But Mummy will cry if I don't go back," she said.

"She will cry dreadfully. It is so unkind of me to stay away when she wants me."

"She has done without you for a long while," suggested Victor.

"But she cried all the time and was never happy. Uncle Andrea said so. That was why he fetched me."

As she spoke she saw Miss Busby and Mabel advancing towards them, apparently more interested in this encounter than in anything else around them.

"Well, Peggy!" said Mabel. "Crying as usual. But how smart you look, doesn't she, Miss Busby? Smart and tidy. I see you're wearing white shoes and stockings. . . ."

"Hush!" said Miss Busby. "We should always remember, my dear, that though this is not a church for us it is a church for the poor Italians. What peculiar taste they have! I'm not sure that I like these black and white stripes, though they might look well on a jumper. Can you tell us what we ought to admire, Mr. Gerard, or shall we need a guide? Not now, of course. It is nearly lunch-time and we shall have to cross the square in that blinding heat again. I knew it wasn't worth while coming this morning, but Mabel was in a fidget to see some of the sights. I suppose you've seen them all, Peggy, as you've been here a month or more?"

When Miss Busby was in a conversational vein she rarely expected an answer to a question, and she now turned to Victor again and continued:

"You would hardly think that the children were step-sisters and had not seen each other for weeks, would you? But Peggy is certainly peculiar in some ways. They are staring at each other just as dogs do before they start a fight. But they can't fight in a church, luckily. I thought Mabel would be so glad to have Peggy back. She is always complaining that she feels so dull and has nothing to do. I must say that in my humble

opinion hotel life is not the thing for girls of their age. It is unsettling. Well, Mabel dear, don't you wish to give Peggy a kiss and welcome her back? Not in the church, of course, but directly we get outside . . . only you must be careful not to get sunstroke."

"I don't mind," said Mabel primly; "but if I do she'll probably wipe it off with her handkerchief."

"I should," said Peggy. "I don't want you to kiss me. I don't want to come. Why couldn't you all leave me alone?"

"Peggy!" said Victor warningly, and signed to the children to precede them out of the church.

"Isn't the glare terrible!" bleated Miss Busby, when they emerged into it. "It makes me feel quite dizzy. Oh, thank you, Mr. Gerard! I shall be glad of your arm down the steps. What do you say that unfinished building we came through is? A cathedral that was to be bigger than this one? But this one is much bigger than such a small city can need. It would do for Manchester: but I suppose the front would not look as clean as it does here. I wonder where Peggy is off to? Look at her."

Victor looked, ran, and caught Peggy again.

"It's no use," he said. "If you reached your mother I should reach you half an hour later. If she took you out of Siena I should find out where you had gone and follow you. You are only making trouble for yourself."

"But I want her," said Peggy. "You don't know how badly I want her."

CHAPTER XXVI

PEGGY had been gone more than a week and Andrea Sarzoni had fallen into his old ways. Every evening he played with Daphne: or if she was too tired for duets he played to her. But he could not help her, and he knew it. When they were not at their music they would sit on the little tiled terrace together near the cherry-tree in which Peggy had clambered when she wanted the fruit. The noises of the city hardly reached them, but every night after the breathless heat of the day the breeze came from the mountains and just stirred the tendrils of Daphne's hair as she sat, sad and silent, in her chair. Andrea knew that she was fretting her heart out, but she did not say much: and he fretted because there was nothing he could do for her now. He had proposed that they should entice Peggy to them again and take her to the mountains: not those they saw as they sat there, but others beyond Florence and more difficult to reach. But Daphne said they were sure to be followed. The Englishman did not mean to let Peggy go.

"I can believe it," said Andrea gloomily. "I have seen him coming out of the hotel. He walks like one who would go through what stands in his way rather than around it: and his eyes are like steel. If he was with us instead of against us we should know what to do."

"We can do nothing," said Daphne hopelessly. "Soon they will leave Siena and take my bambina with them and I shall never see her again because she will die. Three times I have seen her since that man took her away and each time I was angry because I could not

interfere. The first time was at night. The whole party sat at the restaurant in the Lizza and the two children were eating ices. Peggy had on one of those thin white frocks I got her. . . ."

"You sent her her clothes?" interrupted Andrea.

"Yes. I sent them without a word and they were accepted without a word. But I was telling you about Peggy. The night was cool and she should have worn a little woolen coat over her frock. I saw her shiver and I heard her begin to cough. Then I went away because I could not bear it. I have asked Professor Bianchi if he has been called in, but he has not seen the child since she left me. The next time she was in a carriage, and the carriage had no *baldachino*. She sat with her back to the horse in the scorching sun while the other child sat in the shade of her mother's umbrella. She looked white and ill. Then yesterday I was driving and passed them in the Via Ricasoli, and I saw that Peggy looked tired again and as white as a sheet. These are all little things, Andrea, but I feel sure that it is not well with the child. We know that they are not kind to her."

"Did you reason with the Englishman?" asked Andrea.

"An Englishman doesn't listen to reason when he has the law on his side. He says so-and-so is the law: and the law must be obeyed. Even when it is stupid and cruel it must be obeyed."

Andrea sighed and took up his violin. It was about time for him to go: but he put it down again for a moment because the bell rang, and there was the sound outside of an arrival and of a quick firm step across the marble floor of the hall.

"*Ecco!*" said Andrea. "The Englishman! I hear his walk."

"Why does he come?" said Daphne under her breath, and then had to receive Victor because Giuditta brought him out there.

Andrea's melancholy eyes watched him as he made his entry and sat down near Daphne, but did not offer her his hand. He himself, on being presented, made a low bow and received a sufficiently polite one in return. The man had an agreeable exterior. You could see by the set of his shoulders that he had been drilled, and he was dressed with that mysterious combination of ease and precision peculiar to Englishmen. Andrea had a new linen suit on and a straw hat: and he did not look or feel so much like a queer foreign mountebank here in Siena as he had done in an English railway carriage. He was at home and the Englishman was not. At least, it should have been so. But Daphne and Victor were both English and seemed to make their own atmosphere. Probably they wished to talk to each other in their own tongue. Victor had just said that he neither spoke nor understood Italian. So Andrea again got up to go, and this time accomplished his exit quickly: but Daphne kept his hand in hers a moment longer than usual as they bid good-by, and her eyes seemed to say to him, "It is you who are my friend." When she sat down in her chair again she waited for Victor to speak, and he waited till the street door had closed behind Andrea.

"Do you mind my coming to see you?" he said then.

"Why have you come?" said she.

"I thought you'd like to hear about Peggy."

"I have seen Peggy three times. She is ill again."

"Well . . . she got a bit of a chill one night in the Lizza: but she's nearly all right again. Shall I bring her to see you some day?"

"Yes," said Daphne, after a moment's hesitation.

Victor saw that his proposal took her by surprise and moved her deeply. He saw her clasped hands clasp themselves more tightly and her eyes looked as if heaven had opened for a moment: the heaven she desired and that he was obliged to deny her.

"When shall we come?" he asked, fascinated: and he did not know himself that his voice had tones in it few people ever heard.

"Soon . . . soon," said Daphne. "To-morrow, at teatime," and when he went she offered him her hand.

Victor had gone to see Daphne without any fixed purpose, and the proposal to take Peggy there had been made on impulse when he saw how unhappy she looked. He was staying on in Siena—he hardly knew why: to see the Palio: to make sure that Peggy was getting on well: because he had nothing else to do and it was too hot for railway journeys. As he was here he could make things a little pleasanter for Daphne by taking her child to see her occasionally: if she would let him. It might be incorrect legally: but he was not going to trouble about that. He had obeyed the law when he took Peggy from her and the stony misery in her face had haunted him ever since. Now that he knew her it did seem a pity that the child could not be left with her since she made Peggy happy and wanted her so much. The family party at the hotel was not harmonious and Victor escaped from it when he could. Mrs. Twistleton was bored by Siena and showed it, but, for reasons she did not explain, refused to leave. Miss Busby felt the heat as an affliction and did not like the cooking. She complained to Victor that she had to spend the whole day indoors because the children did lessons in the morning and in the afternoon it was too hot to go out.

"I've been used all my life to regular exercise from two till four, but here it is impossible," she said. "Besides, Peggy is a greater strain than ever now that I am responsible for her not running away. I wish dear Mrs. Twistleton could be persuaded to go where it is cooler . . . Switzerland, for instance, or the Tyrol. We did all the sights here in a week, and I can't think what the

attraction is now. I don't suppose the Palio will be in the least like Epsom or Ascot."

"It will not. You may make up your mind to that," said Victor.

"And as for taking a horse inside a church . . . I call it blasphemous. . . . Besides, the horse won't know where it is. . . ."

The embarrassing idea that checked the flow of Miss Busby's lament gave Victor a chance of saying that he wanted to take Peggy out for the afternoon and could he get hold of her at once, please? Miss Busby, who was ready at all times to fetch and carry for Mr. Gerard, said that she would go and see, but that it might take a few minutes to make Peggy presentable. Not that it would be difficult now that she had such a variety of clothes.

"I believe that I caught sight of Mrs. Coverdale two days ago," she said. "We were walking and she was driving. What a beautiful woman she is, and so young! How sad it seems that she should have gone off the rails. Excuse my slang."

Perhaps Victor's glance at his watch suggested that he was in a hurry. At any rate, after waiting a moment for some answer to her remarks, and getting none, Miss Busby departed. In about ten minutes she came back with Peggy dressed in one of her new frocks and bubbling with pleasure and excitement.

"Where shall I say you have gone?" simpered Miss Busby.

"You needn't say anything," said Victor, and walked out of the hotel with Peggy, hand in hand.

"He has a rather cavalier manner at times," said Miss Busby, explaining the situation to Mrs. Twistleton a little later. "I wonder where they have gone."

Mrs. Twistleton wondered too, and gave a guess that disturbed and annoyed her: but she did not try to enlighten Miss Busby. She put on a cool, becoming frock,

and drawing her bow at a venture went for a little walk and found Victor sitting in front of the Duomo looking bored.

"Where is Peggy?" she said, sitting down beside him.

"I've let her go to see her mother," said he.

"I think you should have consulted me first," said Mrs. Twistleton, showing her annoyance.

"I expect I should," admitted Victor.

"I should have been against it."

"I daresay that's why I didn't ask you."

"It isn't fair to me. How am I to control the child if these hostile influences——"

"Why don't you go away from Siena then?" said Victor bluntly. "I can't think what keeps you here: and it's torture for Mrs. Coverdale."

"I am not in any way bound to consider Mrs. Coverdale. She has brought such troubles as she has on herself. But I confess that I've not much faith in a mother-love that first deserts a child and then lives six or seven years without seeing it."

"How could she see it? She was not allowed access."

"No one could have prevented her staying in the neighborhood, I suppose. These sudden caprices do not impress me. There is probably some other man about by this time who is moved by the pathetic story. What sort of creature is the Italian who fetched the child?"

"I don't know," said Victor, too angry to say that he had met Sarzoni or to describe his appearance. At times he was beginning to dislike Rhoda Twistleton intensely. He did to-day, when even under her veil he could see her make-up and the wrinkle's at the corners of her heavy-lidded eyes. Why had she sought him out here? He got up to go.

"I've promised to fetch Peggy," he said, lifted his hat, and went.

Mrs. Twistleton sat still and watched him helplessly. It was a bitter moment for her, for she knew that he went from her in displeasure, and that her tactics had been clumsy. She had seen Daphne on both occasions when Daphne had seen her, and had been gratified by those elements in the situation that the younger woman had found painful: but she had not been gratified by Daphne's increased beauty. She had not been prepared for it. Her ideas went back eleven years, when Mr. Twistleton had brought a girl of seventeen to Manchester and asked Rhoda to befriend her. There had never been any friendship between them, and Rhoda still thought of her predecessor as she had known her first: a shy, unhappy, high-spirited creature being gradually broken by life, bewildered and lonely. To-day Daphne looked as if life had molded and made her, sadly, perhaps, but exquisitely. She was no longer penniless, she was no longer in bondage: but she had lost her child. Mrs. Twistleton thought of the clothes that had been sent to Peggy and smiled. They meant a great deal, and she knew just how much. They represented more than the money they had cost: far more. Mabel was never dressed so finely and carefully, and she was jealous of the pretty things Peggy now possessed. The children bickered more than ever, and Miss Busby was insufferable with her complaints and her everlasting neuralgia. But Mrs. Twistleton did not mean to leave Siena just yet. The position was piquant, though it was not developing quite as she wished. She wanted Victor as well as Peggy for her own. She wanted him rather badly. It had been mortifying just now to see him get up and go.

Meanwhile, Victor marched across the piazza and through the crowded streets in an angry mood. Legally he was allied with Mrs. Twistleton against Daphne, and he was beginning to find the position unpleasant. He

could not get out of it, however, unless he left Siena, and that would not take him out of it really. So he might as well stay. He wished he had never taken up his quarters in the same hotel. He was seeing too much of Mrs. Twistleton and that fool of a governess. He was wasting his time, too. Never in his life had he wasted so much time. Peggy should come home at once and he would take a good hard walk outside the house. What he wanted was exercise. This hanging about narrow streets and churches did not suit him.

"How late you are! We thought you were never coming, and we want our tea dreadfully," said Peggy, directly he entered the room.

"You haven't waited, surely?" said Victor, but he saw that they had, and that, as Peggy pointed out, there were lovely things for tea: first little rolls and butter, and then cakes, and then wild strawberries with a little wine and sugar and then—oh bliss!—ice cream. They had it on the terrace, where it was quiet and shady and almost cool. Daphne wore white to-day and looked a little worn by the heat, but happy because Peggy was with her. Giuditta came to and fro waiting on them. The love-birds crooned to each other and Peggy chattered and enjoyed her tea. She looked a different child up here with her mother. Little as Victor knew about children, he could see that.

"I wish I needn't ever go back," she began when tea was over and she had eaten more ice-cream than Daphne wished her to. Daphne evidently could not say "No" to her. Victor saw that too.

"Can't you leave me here, Mr. Gerard?"

"I'm afraid I can't," said Victor.

"Why not?"

Victor looked at Daphne and did not attempt to answer the child.

"You mustn't tease, Peggy," said Daphne. "At your age you can't have everything explained to you."

"You just do as you are told. It's quite easy," said Victor. "Go and put on your hat now, Peggy. I promised Miss Busby to return you safely at six, and it's half-past six now."

"Then you can't keep your promise and I needn't go yet," said Peggy.

"Do as I tell you," said Victor in his lowest and gentlest voice: the one that meant you must obey whether you wanted to or not; but the odd thing about it was that you always did want to so much that your unwillingness melted away. For instance, to-day you did not want to go, but you knew that you must, and you did not mind because it was Mr. Gerard. It was rather contradictory and difficult to understand. However, Peggy, pouting a little but obedient, went for her hat. Daphne, rather amused, looked on.

"You seem able to manage a child," she said.

"I? Not at all. I don't like children," said Victor.

"Don't you like Peggy?"

"Not much. Look at the trouble she is to us all."

"She would be no trouble to anyone if she was with me."

"She would eat too much ice-cream," said Victor, and their eyes met, his twinkling with laughter and hers taken by surprise.

"How can I say 'No' to her when she is with me for a moment—like a dream?" said Daphne, her voice troubled. "But the dream has been a delight. I can live on it till it comes again. It is kind of you. . . ."

"When shall we come again? When may I come again?"

"Whenever you please."

"Without Peggy as well as with her?"

"If you like."

"Will you play to me some evening?"

"Come to dinner to-morrow," said Daphne. "To-night I shall be playing with Signor Sarzoni, but to-morrow I shall be alone."

CHAPTER XXVII

AT dinner that night Peggy was full of airs and graces. That the two children should have been allowed to sit up to dinner at all surprised and grieved Miss Busby, who said that she had been used all her life to quiet evenings. She supposed it was a case of doing what the Romans do when in Rome, and in such overpowering heat it was certainly impossible to venture out of doors before six. Still, she did not think hotel food suitable for children at night. However, Mrs. Twistleton had said they were all to come down.

Miss Busby sighed. She grumbled without ceasing to Victor and the children, but not to Mrs. Twistleton, who had a way of cutting her short that was effective but unkind, and Mrs. Twistleton had just appeared.

"I suppose you and Mabel have been to sleep all the afternoon," she said now, for she heard the end of the lady's plaint.

"We did lie down," admitted Miss Busby. "When you can't go to bed till twelve because of the noise outside and wake early as I do. . . ."

"You know I had to wake you at half-past five this afternoon," said Mabel. "I could hear you snore through the wall."

"I've not been to sleep," said Peggy, who sat next to Victor at dinner by his desire, and took strength from his proximity. "I've not been to sleep. But I've had ices for tea: ices *and* strawberries."

"Where did you have tea?" asked Mabel enviously.

"With my mother. So did Mr. Gerard. I don't want

this hot soup. It would make me forget the ice. Can I leave it, Mr. Gerard?"

"No," said Victor. "Eat your dinner and be quiet."

For he saw a storm gathering in Mrs. Twistleton's face and did not want it to break either on Peggy's head or on his own. He had not realized beforehand that Peggy would chatter about a visit to her mother, but he ought to have done. Children always did what was tiresome and inconvenient, and he would like someone to tell him why he was sitting here at dinner with two who did not belong to him.

"Couldn't you take me with you?" inquired Mabel.

"I'll ask next time I go," said Peggy.

"There will be no next time," said Mrs. Twistleton harshly. "I shall not allow you to go again."

Peggy turned her scared eyes first on her step-mother and then on Victor, as if to ask him whether he was going to second such a veto and if it could be imposed without him. But the mask of his face told her nothing. He helped himself to tomatoes stuffed with rice and ate them silently. The rest of the meal was uncomfortable and chiefly sustained by Miss Busby's prattle, which was meant to be helpful but only succeeded in being wearisome. She saw that dear Mrs. Twistleton was annoyed, and she rather thought that dear Mr. Gerard was annoyed too. Two such strong natures!

"You can take the children to the Lizza for an hour and then they must go to bed," Mrs. Twistleton said to her directly they got up from table.

"Can't we have ices to-night?" said Mabel.

"No," said her mother sharply.

"I've *had* ices," said Peggy, with an insufferable air of triumph, and though she did not put out her tongue at Mabel, the pink tip of it certainly appeared and disappeared as they left the dining-room. Mrs. Twistleton, followed by Victor, went to a corner of the lounge and

ordered coffee there. They both lighted cigarettes and seemed to be in a silent mood. Mrs. Twistleton was in a state of nervous exasperation that showed itself in the lines about her mouth and the sulky gloom of her eyes. Victor feared she wanted to quarrel with him and wished he could get away: but he thought it would not be easy. He could not plead an engagement in a town where he knew no one but Daphne, and if he said he was going for a stroll Mrs. Twistleton would probably offer to go with him. Till lately he had thought her a woman of tact and discretion, but here in Siena she had shown herself wanting in these qualities. She was too much with him and not always agreeable. . . .

"I suppose you are very angry?" she began, when some people at a neighboring table went out and left them in their corner with no one near.

"Why should I be angry?"

"Because of what I said to Peggy at dinner: but I felt driven to it."

"I think you made a mistake."

"Why?"

"You spoke without the power to enforce. Isn't that a mistake as a rule?"

"You mean you will take Peggy to see her mother in spite of what I said?"

"You should not have said it."

"The situation is intolerable. I know I can end it to-morrow by leaving Siena, but I don't choose to yet. It is you who make it difficult. It need not have been. I thought you came here as my friend. I thought that we should act together. . . ."

This was worse than anything. Victor turned hot and cold with the discomfort of it. He hoped he was not a fatuous man, but there are glances and tones no one can mistake: and how is a man to answer approaches he has not invited and does not desire? A woman may be as

curt as she pleases in her rejection of unwelcome addresses, but the strong unwritten laws of chivalry make it difficult for men when they are pursued instead of pursuing. They must pretend, as long as they can, not to see.

"You want to stay for the Palio?" he said.

"I want to. We have our seats. It's only a week now. When shall you see Mrs. Coverdale again?"

"To-morrow. I'm going to dine with her."

He did not know why he should be made to feel like a criminal when he announced this harmless engagement, but there could be no doubt about the offense it gave: and Mrs. Twistleton, who could usually keep her temper when it served her to do so, now lost it.

"It would have been in better taste not to tell me," she said, and her voice was unsteady with rage. Peggy's stories about her step-mother, which he had only half believed, crossed Victor's mind with uncomfortable reality. They were illustrated and supported by the lowering passion in the face before him. He only answered her last remark by a slight movement of displeasure.

"It was not what my husband expected . . . this friendship with his first wife," she continued more smoothly. "It would have surprised him."

"It surprises me," said Victor. "But one takes life as it comes."

"It places you in the opposite camp."

"What do you mean? The poor woman is breaking her heart because I took her child from her by main force. I felt like a brute when I did it. So to-day I let the child go there for two or three hours, and to-morrow. . . ."

"To-morrow you are to reap your reward. I understand."

"Well, I'm going out," said Victor, and got up. He was furiously angry, and not only angry, but harassed. He wanted to take the taste out of his mouth, he said to himself, the evil taste of envy and insinuation: and to shake off the uncomfortable impressions of the last half-hour. He walked as far as the Porta Camollia first, but the air was breathless to-night and the paved street noisy and dusty. So on his way back he struck across the Lizza and made for the point of the fortress from which he had seen Siena on her hills by night. As he approached it he saw the glow of sunset through the trees and stood for a while watching it. In the distance the mountains slept in the balmy haze of the Italian night. The sky was beginning to be full of stars and up here the air was faintly stirring and cooler than in the city. There were a few people about, but not many. The crowds were in the streets or in the broad graveled paths below. When he got to the stone seat he wanted there was one figure on it. His heart leaped against his side when he saw that it was Daphne.

"I thought you were at home . . . having music," he said.

"Signor Sarzoni put me off," she said, "so I came out for a breath of air."

"It's late for you to be out alone . . . isn't it?"

"Not for Siena. Everyone is out now after the heat of the day. I've met half my friends."

"But you'll let me see you home afterwards, won't you? The streets are very crowded."

"I go back by quiet ways that you wouldn't know."

The bad taste had gone. To be with Daphne after the other woman was like hearing music after a brawl. Her face was beauty and her voice was peace. An idea hatched that moment in the serenity and charm of her presence came to his lips.

"I'm so glad I've met you," he said. "I want to take Peggy to San Gimignano, just for the day, in a car. Could you come too?"

"Yes, I could," she said softly, and though his own spirits rose to the thrill of pleasure in her answer he heard a note of hesitation too.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I met Peggy with her governess and Mabel. She rushed up to me in a commotion and said she was not to be allowed to see me again. Mrs. Twistleton had told her so at dinner."

"She did."

"But then . . . won't it give great umbrage if you take us to San Gimignano for a whole day?"

"I can't help that," said Victor. "I'm going to do it . . . if you'll come."

"Won't it mean war?"

"Not of my making. If people make war on me I'll fight."

"But what about Peggy?"

"I'll look after Peggy."

Daphne was silent, because she knew that he could not look after Peggy and that it was useless to tell him so. The very next day she saw an instance of the way the child was treated when he was not there. She went into Mosca's shop to buy some sweets she wanted for her dinner-table, and from the shop she could see into the tea-room where Mrs. Twistleton sat at a table with Miss Busby and the children. She saw them, and they saw her, she felt sure. Only Peggy could not see her because she sat with her back to the shop. She seemed to be crying, and in a moment Mrs. Twistleton's voice speaking to the child reached Daphne clearly across the quiet room, for no one else was in there at the time.

"If you don't stop crying at once I'll send you straight

to bed when we get home," Rhoda said. How well Daphne remembered her voice and hated it!

"I'm so thirsty," said Peggy, and now Daphne, by taking a step forward, could see that the two women were at tea and that Mabel had a glass of syrup and water with ice in it before her: but her child had nothing.

"You disobeyed my orders last night," said Mrs. Twistleton. "Whenever you do that you'll be punished. If you were not as stupid as you are troublesome you might know it by this time."

"Can I have some water?" said Peggy.

"When you get home. It won't hurt you to wait."

"What could I do?" Daphne said to Victor that night as they sat at dinner together.

"What did you do?" he asked.

"I went away," she said. "There was nothing else to do since my child does not belong to me."

"They should never have come to Siena," said Victor. "You would have been spared this sort of thing if Mrs. Twistleton would have taken my advice. I wanted to come here by myself, get hold of Peggy and take her to them at Genoa. Then they could have gone to Portofino or Viareggio for this hot weather and had bathing."

Daphne did not speak for a little while. They were nearly at the end of dinner and she was peeling a peach for herself. After weeks of hotel meals Victor had enjoyed every stage and circumstance of this one: the quiet, cool room, the thin glass and old silver on the table, and even the cooking that he chose to think unusually good. He was tired of hotels, he said to himself, and tired of knocking about the world. But he did not see his way yet to the next step. Here things were getting rather difficult and he would be glad when the time came to go away. But when he went he would never see Daphne again unless he came back some day to

bring her news of Peggy. She wore red to-night, deep, clear red, woven through and through with threads of gold. She looked like the Madonna he loved most in the picture gallery: the fair-haired Madonna carrying her child, but the lower part of her face was not as narrow. The same painter had painted the saint he had seen this afternoon in the bleak, bare church on the headland: the fair-haired Santa Barbara carrying her tower. Daphne was even more like her than like the Madonna, and she was dressed like the saint to-night in red and gold. He had escaped from the others this afternoon and gone out by himself, and apparently Mrs. Twistleton had taken the opportunity to bully Peggy. In his presence she had never yet dared to do it. Still, the child could get water at home: and probably she had been troublesome. He had never been able to make up his mind that there was definite ill-treatment: bad enough to make a rupture necessary: and yet he had never felt easy. Besides, if he took the child from her step-mother what was he to do with her except send her to school?

"I'm glad Mrs. Twistleton didn't take your advice," said Daphne, breaking in on his meditations. "Since you control Peggy's destinies at present I am glad that I have got to know you."

Victor's eyes had the twinkle in them that Peggy looked for when he spoke sternly to her but was ready to laugh the next moment. But though his glance was humorous it was rueful too. He would have wished Daphne to welcome him for his own sake, and not only for Peggy's. However, considering the part he had to play in her life he could hardly expect it. A week or two ago she had refused to take his hand.

"The first time I saw you when I told you that Peggy had been ill-treated you did not believe me," she went on.

"I believed you thought so," he amended. "I've never

seen actual ill-treatment myself. I know there is friction, and perhaps at times harshness . . . but. . . ."

"Can't you send her to a good school where she would be well taken care of?"

"I suppose I could; in fact, I've thought of it, but isn't she rather young?"

"No. She would be better at school than where she is."

"Then I'll think of it for the autumn."

"The autumn is a long way off."

Victor, who had just lighted a cigarette, watched the smoke from it and did not speak: partly because Giuditta came in with coffee and liqueurs and partly because he had nothing to say. Daphne got up from table then and they went out on the terrace, where the coffee-tray had been set for them. She began to talk of other things, and after a time she offered to play to him. He went into the sitting-room with her and watched her as she played, watched her slim, supple hands and her profile as she listened to her own harmonies. She should have been Santa Cecilia, he thought, but she was like Santa Barbara with her tower. He saw no vein of coquetry in her or of lightness. She was a simple, rather serious woman who had had the high spirits of youth quenched by the realities of life, and especially by the loss of her child. She was probably one of those women to whom the child is everything: more than any man. The fates drove him to stand between her and her heart's desire when it would have pleased him better to give her what she wanted and see her happy again. However, it could not be helped.

"He will go his own way and pay no attention to what I tell him," Daphne thought to herself as she played. "My first impression of him was the right one. He is kind as long as you do not cross him, but directly you do you come to hardness. He admits it himself.

Besides, you see it in his face, especially when he is not talking and laughing. I wonder if he is going to marry Rhoda. It didn't sound like it yesterday when he talked of San Gimignano. But one never knows."

"What are you thinking of?" said Victor, for it was nearly dark in the room now and Daphne had left off playing. They had sat silent for some time, and he could still make out her figure at the piano and her face turned towards him when he spoke.

"I was thinking of your marriage," she said, with the audacity born of the intimate hour and of the darkness.

"Of my marriage!"

"Yes. If you married the wrong woman, Peggy——"

Victor stopped her with an ejaculation that sounded as if it would have been "Damn Peggy!" if it had been articulate.

"Are you never going to think of me except in relation to Peggy?" he asked.

CHAPTER XXVIII

VICTOR had arranged the expedition to San Gimignano on the spur of the moment, and he had ordered the car to be at the hotel at 9 o'clock, but he had not said anything about it yet to Mrs. Twistleton or Peggy. He had hardly seen Mrs. Twistleton yesterday, except at lunch, when she had been in a silent mood: so that the others, affected by her sullenness, became silent too, and ate without speaking. The meal had been somber and Victor was counting the days now to his departure, for he had made up his mind to leave Siena and bid Mrs. Twistleton good-by directly after the Palio. The situation had become difficult and a little ridiculous: and the only way to end it was to go. He must break the news to Daphne somehow, and he dreaded that. She would want him to hover near Peggy indefinitely and protect her, but he could not do it. Women were unreasonable. Peggy would come to no harm for the next few months, and in the autumn he would send her to a good school. She would be happier at school than with her step-mother, who certainly disliked her. Even now Victor did not believe that there was anything serious to complain of: at least, he did not believe it steadily, but he was not quite easy, and if Miss Busby had been a different person he might have confided in her and put her on guard. But Miss Busby had a soft job and knew it. Besides, there was no fight in her. She crumpled up at a look from Mrs. Twistleton. She would be in a flutter this morning when he proposed to take Peggy off for the day, and she would cackle and argue. . . . Victor wanted to shake himself

as a dog does when it comes out of the water: he wanted to shake himself free of his present traveling companions.

Mrs. Twistleton always had her breakfast upstairs, but when he went into the dining-room at half-past eight Miss Busby and the children were there and were apparently having an altercation.

"I am so glad you have come, Mr. Gerard," said Miss Busby before he was across the room. "I can do nothing with Peggy this morning, and Mabel, who is old enough to know better, is nearly as bad. I wish you would speak to them."

"I'll do more than speak to them if you want me to," said Victor, summoning a waiter as he talked. "If you like I'll get a thick stick—I don't know why they are laughing."

"It's that colonel of cavalry," fretted Miss Busby. "Really, he and his family. . . ."

"Those people at the next table? I thought they seemed pleasant. But they are not here now."

"They have only just gone. The colonel—I know he is a colonel because his friends address him as *Colonello*, so I asked our waiter. If you can believe it, Mr. Gerard, he is a colonel of cavalry."

"Why shouldn't I believe it?" said Victor.

"But, Mr. Gerard, have you noticed him shoveling food into his mouth with his knife?"

"I have."

"If it was infantry! But cavalry! And this morning he buttered bread for the whole family with a teaspoon, and when it was buttered—when it was *buttered*, Mr. Gerard—they all sopped the slices in their coffee, and bit them: and Mabel and Peggy wanted to do the same. I was just explaining to them that English people should set an example at table: but they pay no attention to me. Hotel life has not a good effect on them: and as for lessons here, they are a farce. We might

as well be out in the Lizza while it is cool, but Mrs. Twistleton thinks it better. . . .”

“You won’t mind my taking Peggy off for the day, then?” said Victor, breaking in when Miss Busby stopped for breath.

“When?” asked Miss Busby.

“To-day. This moment. The car will be here at nine. Peggy, go and get your hat.”

“Are we going out in the car? Where to? Shall we be back to lunch?”

“Don’t ask questions. Do as you are told. Quick! Off with you.”

“Are you going to take Peggy and not me? Can’t I come too?”

“Not to-day. I’ll take you both to-morrow.”

“But does Mrs. Twistleton know?”

Miss Busby and the children all seemed to speak at once. Peggy was full of joy. Mabel was nearly crying and Miss Busby looked uncertain and alarmed.

“Perhaps I had better consult Mrs. Twistleton,” she suggested.

“By all means,” said Victor, and got up. He was in the hall with Peggy about ten minutes later when Miss Busby appeared.

“Mrs. Twistleton says that Peggy is not to go,” she whispered. It was a distressing moment for her because she was obliged to deliver the message and felt afraid of its effect. However, Victor did not slay her on the spot, or even show any anger. He just turned to Peggy.

“Go and get into the car,” he said, and then he walked straight upstairs and knocked at Mrs. Twistleton’s door. Miss Busby had followed him and heard Mrs. Twistleton tell him to come in. She wondered what would happen. Two such strong natures!

The room was in semi-darkness because the jalousies were shut, but Victor saw that Mrs. Twistleton was in

an easy chair with her coffee-tray on a table beside her. She looked up at him angrily when he went in, and waited for him to speak.

"I am very sorry," he began, for he felt that he owed her some apology. "I ought to have told you yesterday."

Still she did not speak, and when he grew more accustomed to the light he saw that she was silent as the air is before the storm bursts. Her face shocked him when he saw it like this, without its usual mask of placid self-control; just as once or twice certain tones in her voice had shocked him by their unexpected savagery.

"Peggy is not to go," she said between her teeth.

"I'm sorry," he said again, "but I'm afraid she must. I've made the engagement for her."

"With that woman?"

"With her mother, yes."

"It is insufferable. It is insulting to me, but I suppose you are in that creature's power and cannot see it."

"I certainly don't see it," said Victor. "I daresay I ought to have said something yesterday: but I only saw you at lunch."

"If you take Peggy to-day I shall complain to my husband's solicitors. I will not act with you any longer; you must resign the trust."

"I shall not do that."

"He would never have appointed you if he had known what was going to happen."

"I must go," said Victor, and got out of the room as best he could. Five days still to the Palio, in an atmosphere as sulphurous as this. He began to wonder whether he could endure it and what would happen if he went away, leaving Peggy behind. He could not take her with him: at least, he would not. Even Daphne could not expect that of him: but was there any limit to what Daphne would expect where Peggy was concerned?

"You've brought no wrap for her. It may be cold as we come back," she said, the moment she saw them this morning; and would have rushed upstairs herself if Victor had not been too quick for her and barred the way while she told him what to ask for. How charming she looked, laughing and protesting, as he stood above her on the staircase. She wore white to-day and carried a scarlet cotton sunshade: one of those with a striped edge that English people buy in Italy, but that no Italians use. The shadow that usually clouded her face had vanished, and he got an impression of what she would look like if she was a happy woman instead of a bereaved one. He wished he knew a little more about her past history: how she had come to marry Mr. Twistleton and then to leave him. She must have been a child at the time. She did not look more than twenty-six or twenty-seven now: and after all, what did her history matter when the windows of her soul were clear and shining? She must lead a lonely life now and a sad one. Yet she made it attractive. She was one of those women who would turn a cave into a home and give it a character and an atmosphere: but she must feel that her empty home was a mockery. He liked to see her and Peggy together: and after to-day there could not be much more of it. She should enjoy to-day and so would he.

"I wish we were always together," said Peggy, just before they reached Colle. "I like being all alone with you, Mummy, but when Mr. Gerard is with us we do more exciting things. Miss Busby says that we are going to a place called Vallombrosa after the Palio and that it is full of dead leaves and will not agree with her. Are you coming there with us, Mr. Gerard? I hope you are."

"I don't know," said Victor, who wanted to choose his own time for telling Daphne that he meant to return

to England: but he saw by her sudden glance at him that she had taken fright. She said nothing just then, but the idea of his departure had entered her mind and troubled it: so that her day was not as care-free as he wished. He knew that whenever she was silent she was thinking of the future and of what would happen to her child when he was gone.

Presently in front of them they saw San Gimignano set on its hill, its tall, square-built towers rising from its ancient houses and standing out against the cloudless blue of the sky. Night was the time to see the place, Daphne told Victor: a warm Italian night when every archway and courtyard, every by-street and balcony were in deep shadow or shown to you in the white, mysterious light of the moon, when the owls cried from tower to tower and when the clocks tolling the hours called to mind nights long ago when they had tolled away the lives of men doomed to die at dawn. She told him the story of the two young brothers done to death in front of their own house on the Piazza and afterwards terribly avenged: and she told him about Santa Fina, who lay on a plank and rotted till she died. And she told Peggy about St. Augustine and Gozzoli's picture of the child who had been spanked by the schoolmaster.

"We will go and see that first," said Peggy. "I don't want to see the other things. I'm tired of cathedrals."

But they did not go there until late in the afternoon, and by that time they had done a good deal and were tired. However, Peggy's interest revived when she saw this record of an episode that roused her sympathies, and she studied it with attention.

"When *she* whips me she puts me on the bed," she said.

Daphne shuddered and turned away.

"Come for a little walk on the ramparts," she said

to Victor. "There are lovely views, and we can sit in the shade."

"You seem to know the place well," he said jealously.

"I've only been once before, years ago. We came from Florence and stayed a week."

"You and Major Coverdale?"

"Yes."

They walked on together in silence, ghosts between them. But before long they found a place where they sat down, while Peggy, seeing a slope bright with field flowers, ran a little way off to gather them.

"You are not doing your duty," said Daphne, with a little catch in her breath that told Victor she was half afraid to speak but yet felt that she must. He had been studying the pure lines of her profile and wishing he might tuck away a delicate tendril of her hair that the breeze blew here and there inconveniently. She tried to do it herself once or twice, but it evaded her, perhaps because her thoughts were on other things.

"You have the power. You ought to use it," she went on. "You ought to make it impossible for Peggy to be badly treated. The idea of that woman whipping her drives me crazy. I would take her away again and hide if I could go where you would never find us."

"Would you?" said Victor.

"Yes," she said, startled by the depths in his voice. "I would."

"Wherever you went I should find you. I should want to find you."

"To get hold of the child again?"

"To see you." The color came into her face at his tone, but she held out her arms to Peggy, who came running towards them with a bunch of poppies that she insisted on fastening in her mother's dress.

"You must stay with us now and get cool before the drive home," said Daphne, and let the child wriggle into

a place between Victor and herself and arrange her flowers there: so the intimate moment ended and did not come again that day. But she asked him, as they sat there, whether he was going to Vallombrosa.

"No, I'm not," he said. "I'm going back to England directly after the Palio."

"Need you go?"

"I'm going. I'm tired of this life. I want to get to work again."

"What is your work?"

"I was in business in Australia. I may go there again. I had a letter the other day from my late partner suggesting that I should."

"In that case, of course, you would resign your trust?"

Victor laughed, but not mirthfully: got up and offered Daphne his hand to help her up, for they had been sitting on the ground.

"We ought to be going," he said. "I seem to be a success as a guardian and trustee. I've been asked twice in one day to resign the job."

"I don't want to go home yet," said Peggy. "Why can't we stay here all night, and to-morrow too, and to-morrow night? Why do things always end when they are nice and last when they are horrid? What is going to happen to me when you go to England, Mr. Gerard? Can I go back to Mummy? I hope I sha'n't have to go to Vallombrosa with *them*. It is not as bad in a hotel as it used to be at Beda Close, but I'm very miserable when you are not there. Yesterday dinner was like Beda Close. You feel as if a black cloth was on the table and it makes you black inside. I was sent upstairs because I ate my beans with a knife, but I was only trying to imitate the *colonello* and make Mabel laugh. I hope you'll be there to-night. If you are not I shall go to bed and hide. There is sure to be a row."

"Why?" asked Daphne. Victor had turned silent and

rather gloomy, so that she was glad of the child's chatter at the moment.

"Because I was forbidden to come to-day," said Peggy.

"Then how is it that you did come?"

"I don't know. I suppose Mr. Gerard does. He told me to get into the car and we came. Did you persuade her to change her mind, Mr. Gerard, or did we just come?"

"We just came," said Victor.

"Then there will be a row," said Peggy.

CHAPTER XXIX

PEGGY proved mistaken. There was no row that night or next day. Mrs. Twistleton seemed to accept her defeat with indifference and to pass from a condition of thunderous ill-humor to one of smiles. She asked no questions about their day at San Gimignano, but talked of what she had done herself in Siena. The city was in a turmoil, she said, and to escape from it she had driven out to Belcaro and spent the afternoon there with Miss Busby and Mabel.

"You ought to go there," she said to Victor. "The view from the castle is magnificent, and the drive isn't bad."

Victor was surprised and relieved. He hated scenes, and though he thought Mrs. Twistleton was in the wrong she had made him uncomfortable. Until lately he had considered her an astute woman and one who had her passions in control; but this morning, and again the other night, he had had glimpses of under-currents from which he desired to turn his eyes. The position was difficult, no doubt: difficult for them all. She should never have come to Siena: and he, quite unexpectedly, had drifted into terms of friendship with Daphne. His thoughts were full of Daphne to-night and of their long day together. Now she sat at table alone and her child was here in the hotel with him. If he could escape after dinner he would stroll round and see how she was getting on. She no longer received him glacially as she had done at first. In fact, once or twice, lately she had seemed glad to see him for his own sake, and this after-

noon when he had said he would find her wherever she went the color had come into her face like a flush of light, and it had been because of her commotion that she had held out her hands to Peggy. He felt sure of that, and he wanted to see her so transfigured again. Meanwhile the memory remained with him like an agreeable glow.

While he dreamed, the children were both wide awake and hammering at him about his promise to take them out next day, so that he was obliged before long to answer them and ask them where they wanted to go: and he had to confess that he had not ordered the car again. He reminded them that there would be trial races on the Campo every day till Friday and that they must all be there to see them, and that therefore they could not be elsewhere.

"But you promised," said Mabel.

"Yes, you did," said Peggy. "You said you would take us both out to-morrow. We can go after lunch and come back in time for the evening race."

"I thought you all went to sleep in the afternoon," said Victor, but he turned to Mrs. Twistleton and asked her whether she would go to Lecceto next day if he sent an order for the car. He proposed that they should start in the cool of the morning and take lunch with them, and come back in time for the first trial race at night. He had been told that the one next morning was not important and that the stand on which they had taken seats would hardly be ready. Mrs. Twistleton said that she would be glad to be out of the noise and dust of Siena all day, and that on some other afternoon this week they would drive to Belcaro again if Victor would go with them. He said he would with pleasure, and got up from dinner with a comfortable sense of wheels running smoothly again. He did not know what had oiled them, but that did not matter since they were oiled.

The only person who now seemed discontented was Miss Busby. She said that the week's programme was heavy and that too much pleasure was worse for children than too little. She expected both Mabel and Peggy would be made ill by fatigue and excitement, and she was quite sure that she would be ill herself. She did not make these remarks to Mrs. Twistleton, but in a grumbling undertone to Victor, who hardly knew what to do with her confidences. As soon as he decently could he escaped from them: but he did not escape so easily from Mrs. Twistleton. It had become a habit to have coffee in the lounge with her, and on most nights a stroll through the town or in the Lizza after coffee. Sometimes she did not want a stroll, and then he got away by himself. But to-night she proposed that they should see what was being done on the Campo in preparation for the Palio.

"There will be nothing there, but some half-erected wooden stands," said Victor, who was on edge to see Daphne again, if only for a moment. Mrs. Twistleton had taken great pains with herself and looked her best to-night: but he had no eyes for her. No doubt she was still a handsome woman, and she knew how to move and dress: what jewels to wear and just what kind of quietly splendid wrap to put in his hands when he stood there politely ready to cover her shoulders with it. But she had no charm for him: as the other woman had. Her eyes had meanings in them, but not meanings he had tried to call there or wished to read. He found himself turning his own away and more than once ending some moment of intimate silence by everyday talk in which there was safety. He could not believe in what his eyes saw and his ears heard: and yet the thing was being made plainer to him every moment. If he chose he could gather and keep. The fruit was his for the asking and one many men would envy him. But he

did not want it: and he would have to say so in deeds if not in words. He hoped it would be enough to go away.

As he had said, there was nothing to be seen on the Campo but the wooden stands put up twice every year for the Palio: and there were not many people about at this hour. However, Mrs. Twistleton seemed inclined to linger there, and though Victor was on thorns the beauty of the scene called to him. In this evening light the slender Mangia Tower seemed to touch the cloudless sky where the moon, nearly full, was slowly climbing, her bright light thrown on the fountain and the splendid palaces at the upper side of the Piazza, leaving dense masses of shade under the Palazzo Pubblico at its lower end. The stands that ringed the racecourse were dwarfed by the huge buildings: and the great shell-shaped central space that would hold a roaring crowd on Friday was empty now; except for a few groups of children playing round the fountain and their mothers chatting and singing near them.

"We might find a seat," said Mrs. Twistleton, and Victor, fuming and fretting, had to follow her to one of the stands. There they sat down for a while and found nothing much to say. It was Mrs. Twistleton this time who broke the silence.

"I'm getting tired of Miss Busby and her everlasting complaints," she said.

"So am I," said Victor, and lighted a cigarette. Mrs. Twistleton seemed to him soaked in scent, and he liked the smell of tobacco better. She was so close to him now that if she moved slightly she touched him, and in the white light of the moon he thought her face looked unnaturally white and red, as if it owed its tints to cosmetics. No doubt she did make up, but as a rule she made up well. To-night, either she had overdone it, or the moon was unkind: he neither knew nor cared

which. All he prayed for at the moment was a chance to get away.

"Well, you won't be troubled with her much longer if you really mean to go back to England," said Mrs. Twistleton.

"I am not satisfied with her as a governess for Peggy," said Victor. "She is silly and incompetent."

"I suppose Mrs. Coverdale has been talking to you?"

"Need we bring her in?"

"We shall spend the winter in Rome or Florence," continued Mrs. Twistleton. "I shall be able to get someone better there, I hope."

"I want Peggy to go to school," said Victor.

"What?"

"I want Peggy to go to a good school in England."

"When?"

"The sooner the better."

"Why?"

"She is not being well educated."

He had not meant to say this to-night. He had not meant to announce his intentions with regard to Peggy in this hurried, rather brutal way. But it was done now and could not be undone. There would be a storm, no doubt, and he must weather it. He wondered why it did not break on his head at once: but Mrs. Twistleton only said in dulcet tones:

"Most schools are closed now till the autumn."

"I know," said Victor.

"We must talk it over. It might be a good plan to send them both to the same school, when autumn comes. We must get through the summer first. Can't you come to Vallombrosa? You would have your eye on Peggy then, and you seem anxious about her."

"I'm not anxious about her at present," said Victor. "I was last autumn. I thought she would slip through our fingers."

"I suppose you mean to leave her with me for the summer. Or do you want to take her to England at once?"

"It might be better," said Victor, making up his mind there and then to do what an hour ago he had not meant to do. In coming to such a decision he was not thinking as much of the woman beside him, or even of Peggy, as of Peggy's mother and what she would look like when he told her. He felt eager to tell her and to consult with her about the journey and the school to be chosen. As for the intervening holidays, he would ask his sister to have the child for once with her own children, and if that could not be arranged he would send Peggy to the seaside with someone more capable than Miss Busby to look after her.

"I suppose I offended you this morning," said the woman beside him, and he thought she edged a little closer to him: but perhaps it was his fancy. "I confess I lost my temper for the moment, but you have not made it easy for me here, have you?"

"I'm sorry," said Victor, politely.

"Until we came here we got on so well together. I wish I had taken your advice and gone to Portofino. You would have brought Peggy there and all would have been well."

"I hope that all is well now," said Victor. "If I do take Peggy back with me it can only be a relief to you. She gives a good deal of trouble."

Mrs. Twistleton had a fan in her hands, one she had used at dinner and usually carried about with her in Siena. It was a slender one made of tortoiseshell and lace, and as the night was breathless she had opened it several times and fanned herself. But now in the white light of the moon Victor saw that it was shut and that both her hands were closed on it. He was sure as he looked at her that she did not know what she was doing.

He had twice before seen that silent, blinding rage on her face; once when Dingo killed her cat and again when she heard that Peggy was to have most of her father's money; but on those occasions she had controlled herself. He hoped she would now. She would break the fan in a moment if she did not release her hold on it. He knew by watching her hands how furious she was. There was no need to watch her face. It was a hot, uncomfortable moment, and he wished he had not brought it on himself. There! the fan snapped in two, and she seemed hardly to know what she had done, but turned to him and spoke.

"Do you realize that it is a slur on me if you take Peggy away suddenly like that?" she asked.

"It may be a slur on Miss Busby, but I think she deserves it," said Victor. "Besides, if you like we can say that the climate didn't suit Peggy and that you sent her home. Things can usually be arranged pleasantly if people are sensible."

"You have quite made up your mind then . . . to put this . . . this insult on me? And you are quite sure, I suppose, that you are not exceeding your powers?"

"I've not made up my mind about anything except that Peggy must have a better education than you are giving her at present," said Victor with some impatience.

"I thought you would be glad to get rid of her."

"Why should you think so?"

"Well, you don't exactly hit it off together, do you?"

Mrs. Twistleton sighed and looked at her broken fan.

"I wish you would give up this idea," she said.

"What idea?"

"This idea of taking Peggy back to England in such a hurry. Come to Vallombrosa with us on Saturday. We are going by car and there will be plenty of room for you. I believe it is a beautiful place. We can talk things over quietly there, and if you really wish it I

will dismiss Miss Busby and send to England for a first-rate finishing governess. My maid would have to look after their clothes, or we might engage one for the two children."

"I'll think it over about Peggy: but I'm going back to England," said Victor.

It was rejection. He knew it and so did she. The momentary silence that followed was as horrible as the moment before a catastrophe that you see approaching and cannot hinder. Victor felt as miserable as the bravest of men feels on such painful occasions. There was not a rag of bravery in him. He would gladly have crawled under the seat or run away in order to remove himself from the woman he did not want and who perversely seemed to want him. He could not think why. He was thankful when she rose from her seat, letting the broken fan drop unheeded to the ground as she did so. He dived for the two halves of it and presented them to her; but she did not take them.

"You can throw it away," she said, and walked back to the hotel without speaking again.

When he had seen her there he sped like the wind to Daphne's flat for he feared that he was over-late for a call. No light showed behind the heavy old doors, marvelously carved and having elaborate knockers wrought in iron seven hundred years ago; but he rang, and Daphne herself opened to him.

"You!" she said, taking alarm at once. "Is anything wrong? Peggy. . . ."

"Peggy went to bed hours ago, I hope," he said, going into the lighted hall. "I know I'm late. . . ."

"It is past eleven."

"Can't I come in for five minutes?"

Daphne led the way to her sitting-room and turned on the light.

"I was just going to bed," she said.

"I wanted to see you," said he, and looked round the room and through the window at the garden. He saw the oleander with the moonlight on it and the little terrace with its wicker chairs.

"What have you been doing all the evening?" he asked. He felt restless and harassed; and to come here even for a moment was to come to a happy haven. He sat down in the chair he usually chose in this room and looked up at Daphne's face.

"Andrea came and we had music," she said.

"I have never heard you call him Andrea before."

"I do, lately. He has been a very good friend to me."

"I should like to be your friend," said Victor.

He looked at her eagerly and saw the wistful smile that sometimes shadowed the sweetness of her eyes and made a man want to take her in his arms and tell her he would get her the moon if she wanted it.

"You would like to be my friend but you are obliged to be my enemy," she said. "There is only one thing in the world that I want, and it is you who will not or cannot let me have it."

"Is there only one thing in the world that you want?" said Victor, with a chilly feeling about his heart that was new to him.

"You know it," she said, and sighed; and then she unmistakably looked at the clock. So Victor got up to go and said nothing that night of his new plan for Peggy. It had not matured yet, and now that he was with Daphne he did not feel as sure as he had done an hour ago of her pleasure in it. She might approve, but he could hardly expect her to feel overjoyed. What a tangle affairs were in, and how they seemed to revolve round the small, unconscious person of Peggy, who was ten!

"What is that in your hand?" said Daphne as he stood up, and he became aware that he still carried the broken fan.

"It's a fan," he said, and showed her the pieces. "Mrs. Twistleton broke it."

He could tell by the way Daphne stood with her arms straight down by her sides that nothing would have induced her to touch it.

"Peggy said there would be a row when you got back," she ventured. "I hope Peggy. . . ."

"It was I who faced the music . . . not Peggy," said Victor.

"Oh! I'm glad of that."

"You don't mind things being uncomfortable for me?"

"Not in the least."

"Thank you."

"You're not a fan."

They had arrived at the door of the flat again, and Daphne had opened it because Victor seemed to be in no hurry to do so.

"Or a child," she added. "Good-night."

CHAPTER XXX

EVERY evening that week Victor, with Miss Busby and the children, went to see the trial races on the Campo, for the seats they had taken for the day of the Palio itself were theirs for the three days before when the horses and jockeys running had rehearsals night and morning on the sanded course. Mrs. Twistleton went on Tuesday evening when they came back from Lecceto, but she did not go next day. She was in one of her brooding humors, unapproachable and silent. The long expedition to Lecceto had been oppressive in consequence for Miss Busby, and the children had hardly dared to speak, and when they were out of the car kept to themselves as much as possible. Victor thought that he had never known a week pass so slowly in his life; but as the Palio would take place on Friday and he had got to Tuesday night he could not make up his mind to a sudden stampede. Besides, he wanted to see Daphne again and possibly stay on in Siena for a few days after Mrs. Twistleton left for Vallombrosa. That idea grew rosy in his thoughts as he envisaged it: more and more rosy, so that his fancy dwelt on the hours he would pass in Daphne's company with Peggy between them, drawing them together. He had not said a word to Peggy yet of his new plan for her and he had not spoken of it again to Mrs. Twistleton.

The seats taken for the Palio were on a wooden stand erected in front of a crockery-shop on the ground floor, and were close to the umpires' balcony and to the point at which the races began and ended. Each seat had a little chair of its own, but they were not roomy, and

Miss Busby said that the want of space gave her cramp. She came on Tuesday and on Wednesday evening because she had to accompany the children, but although she brought her crochet with her and kept her eyes on it she did not enjoy herself. "There is such a crowd," she said plaintively, "and in these days crowds alarm me. They might begin throwing bombs at us because we are well dressed. One never knows. Besides, the noise makes my head ache. I never heard such a noise. I cannot think why they are so excited. Peggy, if you can't sit still you had better go home. You jogged my elbow then and made me split my wool. Mabel, you are not going to buy those nasty pumpkin-seeds, are you? No, thank you. I should not care to be seen eating them in public like a monkey at the Zoological Gardens. The Italians seem to be easily pleased, poor things! A race round a square on cart-horses and pumpkin-seeds for their refreshment: and penny ices. No, Mabel and Peggy, you cannot stand at that cart and lick penny ices out of wafer cups. I'm sure that Mrs. Twistleton would not approve of it. Will the horses be much longer, Mr. Gerard? The children are getting so fidgety."

"We are not fidgety," said Peggy. "We are enjoying ourselves, but I should like to walk right round the course in the crowd, and buy all the funny things that people are selling. Can I go, Mr. Gerard?"

"I'll come too," said Mabel.

"Sit still," said Victor. "They are clearing the course. Watch them. When it is clear the horses will come, and directly the race is over we must go home."

It seemed to the children that the course never could be clear. It was so densely packed with people. But they saw it slowly and inexorably emptied by the soldiers and carabinieri, who came on step by step, sweeping everyone before them. Most people squeezed into the center, and some went to their seats on the stands: and

in about a quarter of an hour the horses and their jockeys issued from the Palazzo Pubblico and took their places behind the rope stretched across the course just in front of Peggy's eyes. When the rope was let down they were off like the wind. Peggy followed them intently. She knew that there were seventeen wards or parishes in Siena, each having its own emblem and its own traditional friendships and hostilities. Uncle Andrea had explained this to her and had told her that he lived in the parish of the *Oca*, or Goose, where St. Catherine had lived more than six hundred years ago, and that therefore he wanted the *Oca* to win; so when other people near Peggy shouted for the *Onda*, which is "wave," or for the *Istrice*, which is "porcupine," she got on her feet and shouted "*Oca!*" so shrilly that everyone near smiled at her, and some said she was *carina*: for the Italian does not live who will not smile at a child and be kind to it. But Miss Busby put away her crochet and said that Peggy had made an exhibition of herself, and that if she could not behave she had better stay at home to-morrow.

"Everyone else shouts," argued Peggy. But Miss Busby said that she did not, and that it was silly to be excited by a foreign event that could not possibly concern you, and that she did not think Mrs. Twistleton would wish Peggy to talk of that queer-looking musician as her uncle. The governess and the children wrangled all the way home as they struggled through the crowds in the Via Cavour, for Victor, who usually stopped wrangling, had disappeared. He had had a long day of it, and the day was not over yet. He wished Daphne would ask him to dine with her that evening and give him peace: but when he called there he found that she was just going out. A carriage was waiting for her below, and Giuditta told him that the Signora was invited to a villa outside the city beyond the Camollia

Gate, and that to-morrow she had friends to dinner herself, and that on Thursday she would dine out again. It was the "Palio," said Giuditta. During the week of the Palio many strangers came to the city and there was much movement and gayety. Next week all would be as usual again. She spoke in the clear, slow Italian she kept for English people who did not know much, and she used short simple phrases that even Victor could more or less understand. Besides, her hands told him more than her lips. Out to-night, out on Thursday, and to-morrow. *Molti invitati*. The Palio. Always the Palio. *Capito!*

Victor did not feel ruffled. It was natural that Daphne should have her own friends and engagements: most natural, considering who and what she was. All men must adore her, but hitherto he had seen her sequestered from the world and had found her in her home when he went there. The three evenings in front of him stretched long and empty since they were to be without her: and it chilled him unreasonably to find that she was giving a dinner to which she had not asked him. Perhaps her guests were to be Italians; and perhaps there would be Italian men there of a different type from the poor, elderly, deformed musician. Italians frequently married English and American women, but he did not know how such marriages turned out. Victor was not in favor of them. He was not in favor of expatriation at all. But he did not count it expatriation to be in a British colony or a British possession. Women, and especially young, lovely, lonely women, should live amongst their own people and under the protection of their own men. His ideas were behind the times, he supposed: these upside-down times, when women had the vote and were going to do no one knew what with it.

But the elemental differences between men and women

were stronger than fashions and politics, and would remain.

Daphne was a woman with every breath of her beautiful body and soul: a woman to be enshrined and worshiped, helped and loved. She would give more than she would ever receive because she was her exquisite self; but yet she needed a man to perform such services for her as a man can offer the woman he loves and makes his wife. The wonder was that she had not married again long since. In Rome, at any rate, she must have had chances.

The heat had been intense all day, and after dinner Victor got away by himself for a stroll in the Lizza. He went to his usual point of view and looked at Siena with her evening lights glowing like stars in the streets and windows. But to-night he did not hear Daphne's voice there. Strangers were leaning over the low wall to look at the site of some new houses about to be built for the city, and amongst them Victor saw the small deformed figure of the violinist, Daphne's friend. He was not the rose, but perhaps he had been near the rose that day and could give him the latest news of her. Victor went up to Sarzoni and bid him good-evening.

The Italian was polite, but not cordial. He had only one wish with regard to Victor, and it was that the Englishman should leave Siena never to return. His coming had destroyed Andrea's plans completely, and had made his quest vain. To be sure, Daphne had had her child for a few weeks, but that only made the separation ordered and imposed by this man worse for her to bear. He must be a man without either heart or understanding, otherwise the sight of Daphne's sorrow would have stirred him to compassion and he would have arranged somehow to leave the child with her. But he had done nothing of the kind. Never would Andrea forget the night when he had found Daphne bereft and

disconsolate. As well as she could she had told him what had passed on both occasions when the Englishman had been in the house: first to announce his intentions and then to carry Peggy away with him: and Andrea got an impression of a man as hard as stone, without sympathy and rigid in his obedience to the law. With the law behind him he was going to exact obedience from Daphne even if it broke her.

Victor, who did not think much about the Italian's point of view, spoke to him pleasantly because he was Daphne's friend: but found it difficult to bring in her name. It was easier to talk of the Palio and the sights of Siena and to ask Andrea what he thought of the weather.

"I think that to-night or to-morrow there will be a storm," said Andrea, and Victor said he thought so too, since the air was oppressive and the clouds over the hills were black and threatening.

"To-morrow we are all going to Belcaro," he added. "I have not seen it yet."

"When do you leave Siena?" asked Andrea.

"Soon after the Palio," said Victor. "We shall all clear out then, but in different directions."

Andrea only half understood the second part of Victor's answer, but the first part afforded him satisfaction. He lifted his hat and bid him good-evening.

"*A rividerla*," he said. "Perhaps we shall meet again to-morrow at Belcaro. I too am going there in the afternoon."

"Is Mrs. Coverdale going?" said Victor impulsively.

"No," said the Italian. "I am taking friends there from Bologna who do not know it. Mrs. Coverdale knows it well."

So next day, when the party from the Royal in two carriages passed one in which Victor saw Sarzoni and his friends, he was not disappointed to find strangers

with the Italian. He himself was with Mrs. Twistleton and Mabel, while Miss Busby and Peggy in another carriage to the rear got all their dust and wished it would rain. Victor had not wanted to carry out the expedition, for the skies were ominous and thunder was growling in the distance when they started; but the children implored him to go, the carriages were ordered, and the drivers assured him in fluent Tuscan that it would not rain till night. So they drove out of the city by the Porta S. Marco, coming in time to English-looking lanes and English wild flowers that the children would have liked to gather. But in one carriage Victor said that they had better get under cover before the storm broke; and in the other Miss Busby told Peggy that she did not like the look of their driver, who kept turning round and pointing at the landscape with his whip while he jabbered like a monkey in a language she could not understand. Nothing would induce her to stay behind with him in one of these lonely lanes and moreover, if she wanted to stop she would not know what to say to him. The only Italian word that came to her lips when flustered was *avanti*, and that seemed to have the effect of driving him on. If he was a robber. . . .

"He is no more a robber than you are," said Peggy contemptuously. "He is old Settino, and he has a wife and four children, and his *bambino* has been ill. He knows me quite well. Haven't you seen him take off his hat to me? He used to take Mummy and me for drives, and Mummy sent his *bambino* things to eat. And when you want to say 'stop' in Italian you say '*Ferma! Ferma!*'"

The carriage stopped instantly, for Peggy had spoken in a clear, shrill voice; and before Miss Busby could prevent it she was at the hedge getting the clematis and honeysuckle that she wanted. In consequence of this reprehensible behavior the second carriage arrived

at Belcaro nearly ten minutes after the first and at the same time as Andrea and his friends. It was upsetting for Miss Busby, because she did not know Andrea and thought him a suspicious-looking object for Peggy to know. She stood aside while the child ran up to him and scolded her when she returned; but her thoughts were diverted from Peggy's delinquencies by a clap of thunder that took all her nerve away. She was terrified by a storm in England, but what was a storm in England compared with one in this country, where the climate was what she could only call exaggerated? Probably the lightning would soon be exaggerated too, and strike them where they stood. Her one idea was to find shelter, and calling to Peggy to follow her she fled across a courtyard to an open door and hid, trembling, in a loggia decorated with frescoes, for the next half hour. Even when the Italian and his friends came in to look at the frescoes she did not move; for the storm came on in earnest now and she could hear the pelting rain. Peggy had not followed her, but doubtless she had found some shelter. She seemed to have friends at every corner, and she had learned more Italian in a month than she had learned French at home in years. But she was a troublesome child, always doing what she should not do and arriving when she should not arrive. If she found the others, and was by herself, Miss Busby would be blamed, which would not be fair. The storm was over at last and had apparently not struck the castle or anyone in it, although it had certainly been appalling. Miss Busby thought she might venture across the courtyard now and try to rejoin the party. It was only natural that the sudden downpour should have scattered them for the moment, and if anything was said to her she would try to carry it off in a jocular way. What she did not expect was to run into Mr. Gerard just outside the door and to see at a glance that he was not pleased.

"Where is Peggy?" he said.

"Hasn't she been with you?" said Miss Busby in a tone of surprise.

"We have not seen her. Where did you see her last?"

"We arrived together, of course, in the carriage. We were a little late because, although I told Peggy we could not stop, she spoke to the driver in Italian and told him to stop; and then she got out and gathered flowers. We arrived at the same time as that carriage full of Italians and she spoke to the deformed one. Perhaps you noticed him."

"Did you leave her with them?"

"No, I did not. I scolded her for taking any notice of them."

"She was quite right to take notice of Signor Sarzoni. He is her mother's friend and brought her to Italy."

"Oh, is he the person who kidnapped her? How interesting! I wish I had known. I had heard him described, but it never occurred to me somehow. . . ."

"What became of Peggy after that?"

"Well, there was a tremendous flash of lightning and the thunder right on top of it, so I came here for shelter and told Peggy to follow me. I'm sure she must have heard me."

"But she did not follow."

Miss Busby's vacant, timorous glance wandered from the loggia to the courtyard and fixed itself anywhere except on Victor's face, which was uncomfortably serious.

"I don't see her," she said.

Victor turned on his heel and walked away.

CHAPTER XXXI

VICTOR did not feel alarmed about Peggy. No doubt she had stayed behind with Sarzoni and his friends, and if she was left to herself she might take it into her head to return to Siena with them. So it would save trouble if he found her now and kept her with him. What a nincompoop Miss Busby was, and why had a capable woman like Mrs. Twistleton endured her all these years? No doubt she was putty in the hands of her employer. The Italian party had not left yet. He could hear their high, strident voices in the little enclosed garden on his left cackling to each other like cockatoos. So he went in there himself and looked round it. The formal foreign charm of the place interested him, but he did not linger there because he saw that neither Andrea nor Peggy was with the Italians. After the rain everything was dripping wet, and the air, still heavy and warm, was scented here with lemon blossom. The lemons grew in great tubs set on either side of the bricked paths and bearing fruit and flower at the same time. The oleanders were in flower here too, and so were some of the yuccas and dracaenas. There was no attempt at a lawn, but only beds with fruit trees and flowers and the narrow paths in between. Victor came away when he had looked in every corner of the little place for Peggy, and as he crossed the courtyard he met Mabel.

"Mother has sent me to find Miss Busby and Peggy," she said. "Have you seen them?"

"Miss Busby was in there a moment ago," said Victor, pointing out the loggia. "She took shelter from the storm."

"Where is Peggy?"

"I'm looking for her. If you see her, tell her she is to come to me at once."

"Where will you be?"

"I'm going up to the ramparts."

"But what can have become of Peggy? Perhaps she has run away again."

Victor said it was quite likely, and went his way. He got to the top of the winding stone staircase that leads to the ramparts at Belcaro and there looked about him. From where he stood he could see over the low, broad wall into the little garden far below where the Italians were still amusing themselves, and where Miss Busby and Mabel were now sauntering vacantly, both manifestly bored. He turned from that spectacle to the wall on his other hand, and saw spread before him one of the fairest views in Tuscany: a land of undulating pastures and forest spreading as far as the eye could reach towards the blue hills on the horizon. The ilex wood surrounding the castle lay giddy depths beneath him, and as he leaned against the wall he saw that he was high above the tallest trees. To hurl an enemy from here would be to send him surely and quickly to a horrible death, and must have been done over and over again when men fought in such places as this, face to face and hand to hand. Not far from where Victor loitered there was a small shelter or summer-house, and when he had stood for some time looking at the view he went on to it, pursuing his search for Peggy. She was not inside, but Andrea Sarzoni sat there by himself, looking as mopy and miserable, thought Victor, as a sentinel bird in the London Zoo. He wondered why he had separated from his friends: and as he wanted

to ask him about Peggy he went up to him and sat down.

"I have not see her since we arrived at the same moment," said Andrea. "Is she not with the English-woman?—the one who has an open mouth and foolish eyes, begging your pardon."

"She is not," said Victor. "I hoped she was with you."

Andrea shook his head and explained in his ingenuous Italian way and with much physiological detail that the thunder had upset him internally, that he had been suddenly sick and afflicted, and that he was reposing himself here until it should be time to return home.

"What can have become of the child?" said Victor. "Surely she can't have run back to Siena . . . to her mother . . . all that way."

"It is more likely that the storm frightened her and that she is still hiding from it," said Andrea. "I hope it is so. If she tried to return to Siena by herself she might lose her way, the poor little one, and get wet through and tired. It is a misfortune that she may not be with her own mother who knows how to cherish her and make her happy. Behold that woman whom she fears and hates. I go away."

Andrea rose uncertainly to his feet, but sank back again with a sigh as if the effort was still beyond his strength, and Victor observed that the poor little man did look ill and pale. From where they sat they could both see a few yards of the ramparts through a small window in the side of the summer-house: but it was unlikely that anyone could see them. Mrs. Twistleton was walking slowly their way, but stopped before she reached them, leaning with her back against the outer wall, the one high above the ilex wood. She did not seem to be looking at the view, or indeed at any of her surroundings. Her eyes were fixed on the pavement

at her feet and the expression of her face was evil: so evil that Victor, looking at it, was taken by surprise. She was scowling, quiet and dangerous. She was thinking and making up her mind. He hoped she would not come past the summer-house and guess that he had seen her, for then she would know that he had seen her naked soul. Instinctively both men were silent: silent and watching. Why did she wait there, and why did she press closer and closer to the wall, her tall, massive figure rising above it like a tower, rigid and immovable? She held an open sunshade in her hands and with it hid the bit of wall beyond her from the men. At least, she hid it for a time, and when she closed it suddenly they both sprang to their feet. For close to her in full view of them came Peggy along the top of the wall balancing herself carefully and, as the men could see, suddenly uncertain and afraid. She might jump down into safety, she might possibly turn and go back, or she might pass behind her step-mother and reach the summerhouse. The men held their breath as they watched her and did not speak. A sound she had not expected, a movement to alarm her, and she must be over on the wrong side. She was close now. One hesitating step forward had taken her so close to Mrs. Twistleton that it was too late to jump clear of her. Why didn't the woman move or speak? Was she, too, afraid to startle the child?

The sound that Andrea made in his throat was inarticulate, like the low deadly growl of a beast tormented and about to spring: and even before Victor he was out of the summer-house and upon the woman. But both men had seen: seen and understood. Slowly, deliberately, relentlessly Mrs. Twistleton had leaned backwards against the terror-stricken child, pushing her to the abyss: and when the child clutched desperately at her shoulder and her head she had turned in a fury

trying to extricate herself. So near a thing it was that when Victor snatched at Peggy her body was tottering towards the edge, and if her frock had not been strong she must have fallen: while Andrea unceremoniously seized Mrs. Twistleton by the arm and pulled her away from the wall and the child with more strength than most people would have thought there could be in his frail form. It was a scuffle of a moment, and the horror came when it was over: making itself felt in the intense silence amidst which the two men tried to recover their breath and the woman her composure. Peggy, looking at Victor's stormy face, began to cry.

"So you were in there!" began Mrs. Twistleton in a voice that rang as false as her words. "What a mercy! In another moment Peggy would have dragged me with her, I believe. The wall is very low."

"Yes!" said Victor. "The wall is very low."

Another silence ensued, pregnant and denunciatory. Victor took Peggy by the hand and was about to walk away with her when his attention was called to Andrea, who had not spoken at all but looked as if he was going to swoon. The sweat stood in beads on his brow, his color was livid, and he leaned against the opposite wall the image of physical and mental distress. He was groaning a little and muttering something to himself in Italian that Victor did not understand.

"I'm afraid you're ill again," he said to him. "Let me help you down to your carriage. Stop that noise, Peggy, at once. I can hardly hear myself speak."

For Peggy was crying her heart out now, partly with fright and partly because she had a guilty conscience and thought that Victor's anger was directed against her. His hand held her more tightly than he realized and she felt herself a captive and in disgrace. Besides, the adventure on the wall had shaken her nerve, and the last sickening moments of it seemed to get clearer and more

dreadful as she thought of them. However, when Mr. Gerard spoke to her in that voice she understood that he meant to be obeyed: and of course, if you know that you *must* stop crying, you do, and then you soon feel better. Moreover, poor Uncle Andrea did look very ill. Even Peggy could see that, and forgot herself because she felt so sorry for him. Mr. Gerard did not let her hand go, but walked slowly along the ramparts towards the staircase, his arm round the musician's shoulder. Mrs. Twistleton remained behind.

Half-way down the stairs Andrea's friends met him, became aware of his plight and volubly took charge. Victor saw them pack themselves into their carriage with much gesticulation and drive away. As he stood near the entrance watching them he saw Miss Busby and Mabel and made up his mind what to do.

"Your mother wants you," he said to Mabel. "Go up to the top of those stairs and turn to the left. She is still on the ramparts."

"Where did you find Peggy?" said Mabel, looking inquisitively at her step-sister's tear-stained face.

"Ask your mother," said Victor shortly, and turned to Miss Busby.

"I want you to take Peggy home at once," he said, "and don't let her out of your sight again, please."

"I am sure it was not my fault before," said Miss Busby, tossing her head at Victor's peremptory tone. "I told you to follow me, Peggy, when the storm began, but you are always so troublesome and disobedient. Where have you been all the time?"

"She can tell you that on the way back," said Victor impatiently, and put them into the little carriage.

"Come with us," said Peggy to him. "Come with us! I won't cry if you do."

"No," said Victor. "I'm going to walk."

"Then you'll be late for the race."

"Yes," said Miss Busby. "We are late as it is. You had better tell the driver to hurry, Peggy, if you want to see it."

It crossed Victor's mind that after the shock she had had Peggy probably ought to go straight back to the hotel and be put to bed. But he did not say so, because he did not mean to enter into explanations with Miss Busby. He was going to walk home, and while he walked make up his mind what to do. There had been an attempt at murder. He and the Italian had both seen it, but if it had succeeded could they have proved anything? The more he thought it over the more he felt convinced that it would have been impossible. Mrs. Twistleton would have sworn that she stood still at first in order not to frighten the child, and that when she turned Peggy lost her balance and toppled over. It might have happened so. The moment when they were at grips with each other was confused, swift and changing. It was the moment before when she leaned back against the child that Victor saw clearly, and that condemned her. He had no doubt whatever about it. The thought must have come into her mind suddenly, but she had acted on it with determination: as a man acts on an opportunity long desired and suddenly seen. She must never have an opportunity again.

Victor did not feel uneasy about the next thirty-six hours. There would not be a second attempt in that time, and when Saturday came she should leave Peggy behind with him. She would know why and probably raise no difficulties: for she had had a fright. He wished he need not see her again under circumstances that made the civilities of daily life inevitable: but it was easier to wait for her departure on Saturday than to depart himself with Peggy to-night. He need not see much of her except at meals.

He wished he had cautioned Andrea not to say a word

to Daphne and distress her unnecessarily: but as he had little Italian, and the Italian little English, communication between them was not easy. He must try to see Daphne himself to-morrow and tell her of his new intentions with regard to Peggy: but he was not as happy about them as he would have been a week or two ago: for, after all, what had he to say to her? "A few days hence, when I choose, in fact, I shall take away your child whom you love and send her to an English school, where I hope she will be well treated. But you will not see her again unless I countenance some informal meeting that can only last a short time. For years to come she will grow up in the circumstances I arrange for her, and you will have no part in her education and development. I will do my best for her, but I know nothing of children and must leave her body and soul to strangers." But there would be no need to say this to Daphne because she would know that this was what he was going to do: and she would be most unhappy.

He went home by the Campo but remained below amongst the crowd instead of finding his seat on the stand, and looking up at it he saw that Miss Busby was there with Peggy, but not Mrs. Twistleton and Mabel. When the race was over he reached the foot of the stand in time to get hold of Peggy as she came down from it, and keeping her hand in his he led her through the thronged main street. His feelings for the child had undergone a change he hardly understood himself lately, and to-day had accentuated it. He was glad to feel her small live hand in his, and his anger grew hot within him as he thought of what might have been.

"You don't want me to cry again, do you?" her small fluty voice said insistently, and he realized that she had said other things before and that he had not heard them, because his brooding wrath had made him deaf to her.

"Why should you cry?" he said, looking down at her, and he spoke kindly.

"You look so dreadfully angry and you won't listen to what I say," she told him. "I've told you twice that I'm sorry. When I say I'm sorry to Mummy she kisses me and puts her arms round me."

"Well, I'm not going to do that here," said Victor, recovering himself. "What are you sorry about?"

"About being on the wall and running away from Miss Busby. I know I ought not. But first I went with Uncle Andrea and his friends, and then I saw the staircase, and then I saw the wall and got on it. I thought it would be easier than the cherry-tree: and it was easy till I saw *her* and got frightened. Besides, she tried to push me off."

"Nonsense!" said Victor quickly.

"She did. I expect it was a judgment on me for saying I wanted to push her off the tower at Pisa. Now that I know what it feels like I shan't ever say it again. But she did give me a little push, and I caught hold of her anyhow, and then you came and Uncle Andrea and I forget the rest. I haven't told Miss Busby about the push because she wouldn't believe me, but I've told her I nearly fell off the wall and was killed, and she says it serves me right for playing such a trick on her and that she wishes she was in England again. She is rather annoyed because you've torn my frock where you caught me by it, and now she will have to get another out of my trunk. Our things are all packed ready for Saturday. I wish I wasn't going with them. I don't believe you hear a word I say, Mr. Gerard. What are you thinking about? You needn't hold my hand so hard. You hurt it, and I'm not going to run away. It's no use, because you know now where Mummy lives. Shall we see Mummy to-morrow at the Palio?"

"I don't know," said Victor.

CHAPTER XXXII

PEGGY was enjoying the day of the Palio very much. In the morning Mr. Gerard took her here and there in the city seeing what there was to be seen. After weeks of unbroken blazing heat this day of all others chose to be clouded and showery, but she had her mackintosh and he had his. They went to the *contrada* church of the *Istrice* and saw all the costumes, hats and banners ready for the great procession that would precede the race that evening, and for a little while they sat in the church of Provenzano, where a solemn Mass was being sung and where at night the winning horse would come to be blessed while the crowd inside sang the *Te Deum*. Peggy knew it rather selfish, but she was glad Mr. Gerard had not asked Mabel to come with them. She liked him so much, that she liked him to herself, but best of all she liked him and her mother together.

"Can't we go and see her?" she said, and Victor, nothing loth, went to the flat with the child and asked for Daphne.

But Giuditta said that her mistress was out and would probably not be back for some time. "If the Signorina liked to come in and wait. . . ."

"Can I?" said Peggy, but Victor reminded her that she wanted to see another *contrada* church and that then it would be lunch-time.

"I'll just look at the cherry tree and my room," said Peggy, and darted past Giuditta into the corridor. In two minutes she was back again, but as she walked with

Victor towards the church they were about to see, she said:

"Mummy must be going away. I peeped into her room, and there was a trunk half packed with clothes and the bed was heaped up with clothes. Where can she be going?"

"I've no idea," said Victor, startled and displeased by this information. If Daphne was leaving Siena without telling him, his visions of some days with her and Peggy would not materialize. He must see her as soon as possible and persuade her to wait. Perhaps if he went round directly after lunch he would have better luck.

"I wish you would get a big car again and take us both with you," said Peggy on their way back to the hotel.

"Where to?"

"Anywhere: the further the better: for ever and ever."

"What ideas you have!"

"I know Mummy would like it: and so should I."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I think so: but you might ask her."

"Come along," said Victor; "we shall be late for lunch," and remembered as he spoke that he was about to see Mrs. Twistleton for the first time since yesterday. For she had not appeared at dinner yesterday, but had sent a message to say that she was tired and would dine in her room.

She looked much as usual, he thought: self-possessed and in the best of health: but she avoided his eye. He avoided hers too, and did not speak more than was necessary. Luckily Miss Busby and the children had plenty to say, for the children were full of excitement and Miss Busby full of complaints. She had seen nothing yet, she said, because she had been busy all the morning with packing for next day's early start, but

she had been told that the Palio would not take place to-day on account of the rain, and in that case what would happen? Would Mrs. Twistleton wait in Siena for it and want trunks unpacked again?

"I thought you had packed everything yesterday," put in Peggy. "You said it would take you ever so long to find me another frock instead of the one that got torn."

"That was partly what hindered me," said Miss Busby.

Mrs. Twistleton said nothing until lunch was over, and then she called Miss Busby away from the children and told her in Victor's presence that whether the Palio was put off or run the start for Vallombrosa would take place.

"What is to happen about Peggy?" she said to Victor.

"Peggy is to stay behind with me," he said.

Miss Busby's mouth yawed open and her eyes looked as if they would fall out of her head.

"What!" she cried, forgetting to be as polite as usual.

"You needn't say anything to her yet," said Victor.

"I want to tell her myself to-morrow."

"But . . . but. . . ."

"That will do, Miss Busby," said Mrs. Twistleton, and without looking again at either of them walked out of the room.

"This is a sudden arrangement," began Miss Busby. "I shall have to think things over. I may have put some of Mabel's things into Peggy's trunks. In fact, I am sure I have. I think if Mrs. Twistleton knew of it yesterday it would have been more considerate to have told me."

"Don't worry," said Victor, who did not like Miss Busby much but felt sorry for her sometimes. "We won't keep what doesn't belong to us. If we find anything of Mabel's we'll send it on: and will you please tell Peggy now that I am waiting for her?"

He seemed unwilling to let Peggy out of his sight, thought Miss Busby. All this morning he had had the child with him, and now he was proposing to take charge of her this afternoon too: and, strangest of all, she was to be left behind with him to-morrow. What could have happened? But he was not a man Miss Busby felt able to question. He was kind, but he had a short way with him at times.

"If she is going to England with you she will want her warm clothes," she said fussily, "and she has none except a pink coat stained with orange juice, and that is at the very bottom of the trunk. She says her mother threw away her old black serge."

"Never mind, Miss Busby," said Victor firmly. "Will you send Peggy to me now?—and you needn't trouble about her clothes. I'll see to them."

Of course that meant that he would ask her mother to help him. Miss Busby shook her head over the state of things as she went upstairs and wondered again what had happened: but probably she would never know. Dear Mrs. Twistleton was so reticent. So unlike herself. It was all she could do not to tell Mabel and Peggy the news directly she saw them. However, by a great effort she turned her attention to what she had to do, and made Peggy tidy for the afternoon.

It was true that Victor did not feel inclined to let the child out of his sight to-day. He went here and there, he thought of this and that, but he could not forget what he had seen. It burned in his mind, eclipsing everything else with an increasing horror. He went over every moment until each successive stage crystallized in his memory, some with deadly clearness and some blurred. From the time when he rushed after Andrea he only had a confused impression of a struggle and his frenzied snatch at the tottering child. He would like to see Andrea again, and there was a long afternoon

before them. Peggy and he might call at his rooms after seeing Daphne.

But they had no luck. Daphne was still out and Signor Sarzoni was out giving lessons. Giuditta could not say when her mistress would be back, and she seemed annoyed at being asked. Signor Sarzoni would probably not return to his rooms till after the Palio.

"The Palio seems to have a bad effect on the temper," said Victor. "I never saw Giuditta snappy before. She almost shut the door in our faces. Never mind. We'll have an early tea now and then we'll go to St. Catherine's Church to see the *Oca's* horse blessed."

The little church was crowded when they arrived, chiefly with British and American tourists, but Victor found seats for himself and Peggy. They had a long time to wait, but at last the doors were opened and the horse came in, wearing a red, a green and a white ostrich feather all upstanding from his head. He looked pleased with himself and behaved well, only pawing the tiled floor at times while the officiating priest read a few prayers to him and sprinkled him with holy water. When the short ceremony was over everyone filed out of the church after the horse and went towards the Campo. To please Peggy, who did not wish to miss anything, Victor went by the Via Cavour, which was so densely packed with people that progress was made by inches. Every minute or so the sound of the *contrada* drums would be heard, and then the people pressed sideways in the street to let a *contrada* pass, its captain, pages and flag-bearers all dressed now in their finery. Victor had seen this morning in the church of the *Istrice* that the costliest silks and velvets were used for these costumes. The boys who acted as pages were chosen for their beauty, wore long fair hair beneath their feathered caps, and looked like the portraits of young Raphael in Pinturichio's frescoes. The *Alfieri* were older men and

did wonderful feats with their flags, twirling them round their bodies and hurling them into the air to catch them again. They were all on the way to the piazza in front of the Duomo, where they were to assemble for the great procession that precedes the race, and Peggy wanted to go there. But Victor pointed out that they could not be in two places at once, and that if she watched the procession form and start she would not be in her place to see it enter the Campo and march round it. So they struggled through the crowd to the Campo and found a still greater crowd there. To-day every window and balcony was hung with flags and bunting, every seat was occupied, and people had found themselves a niche in all sorts of unexpected corners on roofs and even high up on the Mangia Tower. The beautiful bell of the tower was tolling constantly. Victor could see it move, and showed it to Peggy, but they could not hear it above the noise made by the crowd: for when twenty-five thousand Italians are clustered like swarming bees and in a state of unusual excitement they easily outvoice a bell. A hawker with colored gas balloons attracted Peggy's attention before anything else, and Victor made her happy by buying her two. Then they passed another hawker with an open umbrella filled with fans, and another with one right side up and stuck full of imitation snails and caterpillars like a pin-cushion. Others were selling cakes that looked like currant buns, but after the cakes she had eaten at tea Peggy could not pretend to be hungry. She would have liked an ice in a wafer cup, but Victor got her past the barrow and said they must go to their seats now. In a moment the man, standing head and shoulders above the crowd in the central place, would fire the maroon again, and then the *carabinieri* and the soldiers would begin to sweep the course clear for the procession.

"Are you excited?" said Peggy, squeezing Victor's

hand. "I am: but I wish Mummy was with us, don't you? I wonder where she is. I've looked everywhere, but I can't see her."

Victor had raked the windows, the balconies and the stands as well as he could and had not seen Daphne. It was not likely that she would be standing amongst the crowd by herself: at least, he hoped not. But if she chose to run risks, there was no one to say her nay. Why was there a half-packed trunk in her room, and where was she going? She ought not to be running about the world by herself with no one to look after her. Certainly she had been alone since Major Coverdale died, but she had lived quietly in Rome doing war-work. What had made her restless now? When he got to his seat he would have a more careful look through his field-glass. From where he stood he could see that Mrs. Twistleton, Miss Busby and Mabel were in their places. Peggy should go up in front of him and then he would be sitting next to the staircase and could escape easily if he wished.

So Peggy clambered up the little staircase first, but not without disaster, for one of her gas balloons escaped and nearly frightened Miss Busby into a fit.

"I had not noticed you," she said, "and it came right past me. I thought it was a bomb and that we should all be blown up, so I suppose I did give a scream. I don't know why those Italians should look amused. English phlegm is celebrated, but a bomb is not a pleasant object close to your face. I wish you would keep that one away from me, Peggy. I've always disliked those balloons, and I'm not enjoying myself because I'm on edge waiting for that horrid pistol to go off again. Why a pistol? A bell or a whistle would have done just as well, for no one attends to it. I can't think where all those people come from, and look at those children crawling under the barrier on to the course. They will

get trampled on by the horses as sure as fate. I'm going to shut my eyes when the race begins, and so will Mabel. We don't want to see the jockeys slash at each other's heads with oxbide whips. So unsportsmanlike! and if they foul each other some of them might be killed. I've often said that if I went to Spain I would not look on at a bull-fight, but from all I hear this may be nearly as bad."

"You had better go home," said Mrs. Twistleton in an incisive voice. "I should prefer it if you did."

Poor Miss Busby! The last thing she desired was to be taken at her word and be sent about her business just as the fun was to begin. She was a tiresome, discontented woman, but for once Victor felt sorry for her. She hummed and hawed, tried to excuse herself, thought she might as well stay now that she was here, got red in the face and finally, in obedience to Mrs. Twistleton's eye, rose in her seat and scrambled past Victor and Peggy to the staircase.

"Get into the crowd in the center," he whispered to her. "You'll be all right there and you'll see something."

"I should never dare to do that," sighed Miss Busby, then gave a screech like a steam-whistle because the maroon went off again: but she managed to get down the staircase and out of the crowd safely, and then went back to the hotel, where she lay down in order to soothe her nerves and fell fast asleep. When she waked she wrote a long letter to Mr. Crabbe describing the Palio: only leaving out the procession: for she prided herself on being a truthful woman.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE course was cleared, and from where Peggy sat she could see the trumpeters in medieval dress who headed the great procession. They were coming: and the silence that fell on the Campo was as if the tens of thousands there were suddenly turned to stone. You could hear the bell of the Mangia Tower, rich and low: you could hear the trumpets when the trumpeters actually appeared leading pages, flag-bearers, horses, jockeys, heralds and captains behind them. Each of the seventeen *contrada* made a group of its own, wearing its own colors and conjuring with its own flags. Each one was received with roars of welcome and delight by its own friends, so that the air was rent with shouts and electric with excitement. When the *contrada* of the *Oca* passed Peggy wanted to shout for Uncle Andrea's sake, but the people amongst whom she sat watched it in silence, and she had not the courage to stand up and shout by herself. Most of them screamed and waved when the *Onda* appeared, and she took no interest in the *Onda*, although it possessed some fine *Alfieri*, who stopped in front of Peggy and did all their best tricks with their flags. She wanted to shout for the *Istrice* too, but it passed her corner as the *Oca* had, without an ovation. It was the most beautiful procession Peggy had ever seen, and Mabel, who now sat next to her, said that she liked it better than the Lord Mayor's show or the pantomime at Drury Lane. Peggy had never been to London, so she could not make these experienced comparisons, but she was intelligent enough

to know that the procession derived value from its background and its associations. Uncle Andrea and her mother had both told her stories from the history of Siena, and she knew that the Campo had been the scene of most of them. The men marching slowly past were the descendants of the men who had fought for their liberties in the narrow streets of Siena and had survived the awful siege of 1554, when the inexorable laws of war sent the weak and the old, the women and the children, outside the walls to die. Her mother had said she did not want Peggy to hear of such horrors, and told her there and then about Cagenova watering her lilies and violets on her balcony and playing with the goldfinch in the mulberry tree: but she did not tell her the true end of the story because it is sad. She went on to speak of Provenzano begging on the Campo for his friend who was in prison: and of the donkey-races and races with buffaloes that were run here hundreds of years ago. So Peggy had a little more idea than Mabel of the linked memories that the educated Sieneſe bring with them to the Palio, and of the long traditions of ambition, friendship and hostility that sway all classes when the race is run. Last year her mother had seen a woman near her fall into hysterics on the balcony where she sat because the horse of her *contrada* dismounted his jockey before her eyes: and Peggy, proud of her knowledge, told Victor that when the race was over the winning jockey would have to be protected from being hugged to death by his friends and the second from being beaten by his disappointed supporters. Certainly the scene was memorable. After the rain of the morning the air was fresh and cool, and the clear evening light fell on the packed crowds, on the flags and bunting, on the long, brilliantly-colored procession slowly making its way round the corner, on the shining armor worn by each captain of a *contrada* and on the flags being hurled into the air

at every point of honor. The bands played martial music, the gayly caparisoned horses about to run marched barebacked with their people, the seats reserved for the procession beneath the Palazzo Pubblico gradually became filled with color, and then, when all except the horses and jockeys were massed there, the moment that comes to Siena twice a year had come. The horses with their jockeys issued from the Palazzo Pubblico and took their places behind the rope stretched across the course just in front of Peggy. There were nine, and some were very fidgety. It was a breathless moment till the rope dropped and they were off and away. Three times they were to run round the course, but before they were once round one man had been dismounted and three left hopelessly behind. So there were three left: the *Onda*, the *Istrice* and the *Nicchia* or Snail: and how the people shouted for them! They were coming by a second time now, and to Peggy's delight and amazement a young man white with excitement suddenly jumped up like a Jack-in-the-box behind the stand where no one had been before and shouted "*Istrice!*" till he was hoarse: so she rose to her feet and shouted "*Istrice!*" too, and wished she knew how to say "Never mind" in Italian when the *Istrice* horse was overtaken by the other two. For the young man looked most woe-begone, and sank below the back of the stand as mysteriously as he had risen above it: and as he did so the two remaining horses flashed past the stand a third time, and the *Nicchia* won.

"They are thrashing the *Onda* jockey, the skunks!" cried Victor, rather excited himself; and in his desire to see what was happening he was out of the stand and on the course in a twinkling. Peggy thought she would follow him, and ran down the staircase and into the crowd.

The moment the race was over twenty-five thousand people wanted either to get home or to the church of the

Provenzano to see the winning horse blessed. The people of the *Nicchia* were crazy with delight and were being surrounded and congratulated by their friends. The stands and balconies were being rapidly emptied, but the course itself and the center of the Campo were so crowded that Victor, having left his seat, found it slow work to approach it again. He wanted to get back to pick up Peggy and see Mrs. Twistleton and the children through the throng. But by the time he worked his way to that corner of the Campo they had disappeared; so he went with the tide into the Via Cavour expecting to overtake them, and before he reached the Palazzo Tolomei he did see Mrs. Twistleton and Mabel just ahead of him.

"Where is Peggy?" he said, catching them up.

"She ran after you," said Mrs. Twistleton.

"I've not seen her," said Victor.

Mrs. Twistleton walked on, suggesting by her manner that Peggy's fortunes were no more her affair to-day than they would be to-morrow, since Victor chose to remove the child from her jurisdiction.

"I saw her," said Mabel. "She got into the crowd, and then she met that queer-looking man who was at Belcaro: the man with one shoulder higher than the other."

"Did she leave the course with him?"

"I don't know. I saw him speak to her, and then we had to move ourselves and got into the crowd. Perhaps he took her to the hotel."

"I must go back and see if I can find her," said Victor, thinking that possibly the child had waited for him near the stand. But she was not there. The Campo was nearly deserted now and she was nowhere to be seen. Nor could he find her in the Via Cavour, and when he asked at the hotel she had not arrived yet: but dinner was ready.

"She must have run home to her mother," said Mrs. Twistleton. "Miss Busby can fetch her after dinner."

"I'm going myself now," said Victor, for he felt uneasy.

Crowded as the streets were, it did not take him long to reach Daphne's flat, but when he rang at the old carved doors no one came. Again and again he rang, without result, and as he waited he thought of the half-packed trunk seen by Peggy and of Giuditta's odd manner this afternoon. Now that he thought of it, she had looked embarrassed, and she had wanted to get rid of them because there was something to hide: and she had got rid of him easily. What a fool he had been to go! Probably Daphne had been in the house at the time, and if he had insisted he might have seen her and not be standing here in the dark ringing a bell that no one answered. From the street below part of her garden could be seen and some of her windows. As he remembered this he ran downstairs to look at them. They were in total darkness. A servant girl watching him and belonging to another flat in the house addressed him now and said something in Italian that he did not understand. He pointed to Daphne's garden and said her name clearly.

"*Se ne sono andate e non ritorneranno piu,*" said the girl, and interpreted what she said with her expressive hands. "Gone away. Gone away," she told him.

Victor forgot that he was hungry and it was getting late. *Non ritorneranno piu*, he said over and over again to himself, and it did not need much scholarship to make out what the girl meant. Daphne and Giuditta had gone away. They were not coming back and they had taken Peggy with them. The simplicity and the audacity of it! Victor hardly knew whether to laugh or fume: but he was fuming soon after he was admitted to Andrea's

room and found that the musician knew all but would tell nothing.

"I find that Mrs. Coverdale has left Siena," he began.

Andrea bowed and thereby admitted that Mrs. Coverdale had left Siena.

"Peggy is with her?"

Andrea disclaimed all knowledge of Peggy's movements with a little fluttering movement of his hands, but he did not otherwise deny it.

"She was seen with you on the Campo when the race was over. You were speaking to her. You took her away."

"I am ill," said Andrea, who did look whiter than usual, and worn. "I have not slept. This morning I would go to the police and say to them what I have seen. But, Signora Coverdale, she thinks otherwise. She say, my *bambina* shall come with me and hide from those bad people. No scandal. No police."

Andrea sawed the air horizontally as Italians do in negation, and sighed, as if the effort of speaking English was too much for him just then.

"You told Mrs. Coverdale!" exclaimed Victor.

"Certainly I told her. Everything that happened I told her. She knows that her *bambina* would have been dead if you had not been as quick as the hand of God."

"We were both there."

"But you saved the child. She knows it. She will write you a letter that I shall give you when it comes. But she say that never again shall her *bambina* see that wicked woman . . . never . . . never! So she have gone away."

"Where to?"

Andrea spoke with his hands but not with his lips, and what he said with his hands might mean either that he did not know or would not tell.

"I'm afraid I must know," said Victor quietly.

Andrea's silence seemed to intimate that he had said all he had to say.

"If necessary I shall have to go to the police for help," pursued Victor. "I would much rather not."

"*Dio mio!*" cried the Italian. "Of what paste are you made? Will you still persecute that poor woman and her child? Do you want to send her to prison, where she would probably die? What has she done to you that you should be her enemy?"

"I'm not her enemy," said Victor.

The Italian looked at the Englishman, whose face, in his opinion, was expressionless and cold. The man sat there as still as stone, not to be moved, not to be cajoled. Yet the fine ear of the musician had heard a slight tremor in his voice and a touch of warmth in his denial.

"I'm her friend," said Victor, speaking again, and this time there was no doubt about it, his voice was eager.

"You love her!" said Andrea.

The Englishman blushed. The Italian marveled, understood, and saw the fabric of his own dreams shattered like a spider's web. Automatically, as if to console himself, he took up his violin which lay on a table beside him and put it down again.

"But you would separate her from her child," he said.

"I would not," said Victor.

"But you came to Siena for that purpose. You compelled her to give up the child. You put Peggy in her step-mother's power. Always you have been on the wrong side."

"It does look like it, I know," said Victor, "but I've changed my mind. Anyhow, I must see Mrs. Coverdale, and if you won't tell me where she has gone——"

"You will go to the police!"

"I must find her and I must find Peggy. I'm responsible for Peggy. I can't let her disappear into the unknown and sit down under it. Don't you see, man?"

"What will you say to Mrs. Coverdale?"

Victor stared and laughed. "That's on the lap of the gods," he said: and though Andrea did not understand the phrase, perhaps he followed the Englishman's meaning, for he sighed, and then showing Victor a railway time-table open near him, he pointed to a name on it and explained a route.

"But they went in a car," he said, "and the car must return to Siena, and if you went to the police they would find it. Otherwise. . . ." He looked at a map open near him on the table and pointed to a name on it.

"I am very unhappy," he said, when he had done this. "I feel like a traitor: but to hide is difficult in these days. The police would have found her for you sooner or later, and that would have been worse for her. But I am very anxious, for I do not know what is in her mind or whether she will listen to you. If she will not, what will happen to her and to her child?"

"I'll let you know," said Victor, and before the two men parted they shook hands.

It was close on midnight when he went into the lounge and found Mrs. Twistleton still up and apparently waiting to see him.

"Did you find Peggy?" she said.

"I know where she is," said he.

"Isn't she in Siena, then?"

"No. Her mother is hiding with her in the mountains."

"What for?"

"I suppose she thinks her life was in danger here," said Victor, and turned away.

CHAPTER XXXIV

VICTOR stood in front of the small villa that had been described to him by a waiter who spoke a little English. He knew he had come to the right place because there was a board on the gate with a paper gummed on to it, and on the paper was written in large letters, and in English:

COUNTRY SEAT TO LET. SIX ROOMS AND A GARDEN.

But the gate was locked and the front door was shut. All the windows were shut too, and another gate leading to the garden, and the back of the house was chained and padlocked. The place seemed to be uninhabited: and yet the waiter had told him for certain that the English lady with her child and her servant were there. They had only arrived the night before, but they had gone straight there, and the Italian servant had been in the village this morning buying food and other things that she wanted. The country seat was furnished and belonged to a gentleman in Bologna who had probably lent it to the lady for a time.

Victor had taken two days over his journey, because when he reached Florence his car had behaved as cars often do when the chauffeur is less anxious to get on than his employer. Something had happened that caused delay, and when that something was set right a night in Florence had become inevitable. However, it did not matter much. Here he stood now within hail of Daphne, but apparently she did not wish to be hailed. When he

had rattled on the gate and called to the closed windows in vain he began to wonder what he could do next. How absurd to think that she could elude him long in this way! She would have to come out of the house some time; and if he could not get in he would hang about outside till he saw her. He must see her.

There was not a sound anywhere within. Perhaps they were living in rooms at the back and did not hear. He rattled on the gate again and shouted to Peggy. Some shock-headed Italian girls of the peasant class looked out of an upper window in the neighboring house and seemed to be amused. He wished he could talk to them, but all he could do was to point to the "country seat" and say *Signora Inglese*. They nodded, and said something in voluble Italian that he could not understand. He pointed to the gate and rattled it. They shook their heads then and disappeared. It was maddening. By the time he had stood there for an hour he would have smashed a window if he could have reached one, and got in that way. But there were neighbors close by, and he did not want to be seen housebreaking in a foreign country because it would lead to complications with the foreign police, who might be disagreeable and would probably not speak English. The little house was protected in front by an iron railing and at the back by a high garden wall. He had been all round it.

He actually had to go to lunch at his hotel without having made himself heard, and after spending most of his afternoon at the locked gate he went down the hill to dinner feeling a fool for his pains. After dinner he strolled about the village for a time and sat on a little piazza where a band was playing. The moon shone on the old houses and on the wooded hills that rose high behind their roofs and on swarms of village children, some at play and some dancing to the music. The sum-

mer visitors wandered to and fro, and in front of a café people sat at little tables eating ices. When the music stopped it was nearly eleven; but no one seemed in a hurry to go to bed; and as he strolled back to his hotel and passed the turning leading to the "country seat" he hesitated a moment and then took it. He would have a look at it by moonlight.

At first he thought the place was as lifeless by night as by day; and then, as he stood there listening, he heard the sound of a key in a lock at the front door. He instantly retreated carefully and quietly to a place in deep shade from which he could watch the gate, but could not be clearly seen. He had hardly got there when he saw Daphne come out of the house, unlock the gate, look all ways; and then walk slowly on by the path leading along the hillside high above the valley. He let her get a hundred yards ahead of him and then he followed her. She went on some way past the last houses at this high end of the village and past some farm buildings straggling outside it until she reached a bend in the path, and at the corner of it she sat down, her chin in her hand. She wore no wrap over her light summer dress and no hat, for the night was warm. The valley was flooded with moonlight; the twin peaks commanding it seemed close to the bright stars above them, and from the village far below her came sounds of human life and at the hour the loud chimes of the church clock striking five times to inform the world that it was eleven.

Victor, now that his hour had come, wondered how he would begin so as not to alarm and repel her. He was far from sure of his reception or of what the issue of their meeting would be: and he felt both eager and anxious. If she would not listen to him he did not know yet what his next move would be. Now she heard his step, looked up at him, half rose, and then sat down again,

her face expressing terror, disappointment, chagrin: perhaps uncertainty.

"Don't look at me like that," he said, his eyes searching her face. "I told you that wherever you were I should find you."

"The day has been so hot," she murmured, as if apologizing to herself. "I came out for a breath of air. I thought at this time of night. . . ."

"You know that I've been besieging your house all day?"

She looked down and did not speak.

"You know that you could not have kept me out for long. I should have got in somehow."

"But how did you know that I was here?"

"Sarzoni told me."

"Andrea! Andrea betrayed me! With what, then, did you threaten him?"

"I had to find you . . . and Peggy."

"I thought you would go to the police. I did not think you would use the thumbscrew on poor Andrea. He believed that I should be safe here for a time. The house I am in belongs to his friends. They have lent it to me."

"If you thought you were safe why did you lock all the doors and windows?"

"I couldn't feel as sure as he did. I was afraid you might find out somehow and come for Peggy. The police might have traced the car: and of course we are more conspicuous in Italy than Italians would be. It is difficult to hide."

"Very difficult," agreed Victor.

"But there was nothing else to do. If it had not been for you Peggy would be dead now. I know that, and I am grateful. But I cannot feel grateful to you for anything else. I warned you and you would not listen.

I will not let Peggy go back to that woman. If you insist on it I shall make the whole story public and fight the case in England. I daresay I should lose it. One knows what law-courts are. The men would be like you. They would not believe me or esteem me because. . . ."

"I esteem you more than any woman in the world," said Victor, moved by the sight of her helplessness and her distress.

"But you mean to separate me from Peggy."

"I mean to look after Peggy."

"But you don't . . . you don't. The other night she was nearly murdered. Next day she was carried off. What do you want to do with her now? To take her back to——"

"No, no," said Victor. "How can you think so? Don't cry. Don't look so unhappy. I know I've failed, but I want to make good. If only you'll listen to me. . . ."

He took her hand in his, her beautiful slim hand that had been supporting her chin till now.

"It is burning hot," he said, as he carried it to his lips. "You are ill."

"I am not ill," said Daphne, trying to draw her hand away, "but I am most unhappy. I can't let my child go."

"There is a way out if you will take it."

She looked at him, waiting for him to speak.

"I didn't come for Peggy only," he said; "I came for you. I want you for my wife."

She sat still and silent as if his words gave her pause: but when he put his arm round her she drew a long sighing breath and looked at him again.

"Are you saying this for Peggy's sake or for mine or for your own?" she questioned him, but he only answered her by taking her more closely in his arms.

"If you come to me will it be for Peggy's sake or for

my own?" he countered, and had to be content with her smile.

"Why did you run away from me?" he said soon. "Didn't you guess what was in my mind? Didn't you know your own?"

"I didn't know my own: and I didn't know yours. That day at San Gimignano you took me by surprise, and I've thought about you ever since. But I understood that you were going to England. You said so. I would not let myself believe. . . ."

"But you believe now?"

"I told myself . . . I tried to make myself think that I never wanted to see you again . . . and to-night when you appeared I still felt all ways . . . afraid . . . glad . . . sorry . . . because of Peggy."

"There comes Peggy!" said Victor, and in the moonlight they saw the child come round the corner and approach them.

"I left her in bed," cried Daphne, and Victor saw that Peggy had only thrown a dressing-gown over her night attire. When she saw him she gave a cry of delight and flung herself upon him.

"You are the most forward young woman I've ever met," he told her as soon as he could speak. "You take my breath away. Now if your mother would do that. . . ."

"It isn't likely," said Peggy.

"Why isn't it likely? What do you know about it?"

"Her one idea is to get away from you. I'm always glad to see you, but she never is."

"Peggy, be quiet," said Daphne.

"Well, you pulled me away from the window this morning when you saw him," narrated Peggy; "and you turned first red and then white and you cried. I believe you're afraid of him. You needn't be really. He's very kind."

"Oh, is he!" cried Victor. "You wait, young woman, and see if I'm kind when you get out of bed and take moonlight walks in half-dress. This is the second time. . . ."

"Last time you carried me home," said Peggy, rubbing her cheek against his. "But I've shoes on to-night."

"You are very naughty, Peggy," said Daphne. "How did you know which way I had taken?"

"I watched you from the window and I saw a man follow you, so I thought I'd better come and see. I knew you, but I couldn't make out who the man was, and it might have been a brigand."

"If it had been, what did you propose to do?" asked Victor.

"To stay with Mummy," said Peggy.

"Even if the brigand took her to his cave?"

"I suppose so."

"He might not have wanted you both."

"Well, it was you, luckily," said Peggy, after considering in vain how to solve such a problem.

"Shall we tell her?" said Victor, turning to Daphne.

"Is it something nice?" cried Peggy. "I expect it is. Nice things always happen when you come. Are you going to take us with you in a car again?"

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"Back to Siena first, I think," said Victor, turning to Daphne for approval, "and then probably to Rome or Florence when the necessary formalities——"

"We are going to be married," said Daphne.

"What a good idea!" said Peggy.

"It is rather, isn't it?" said Victor. "Saves a lot of trouble. No more running away, I hope."

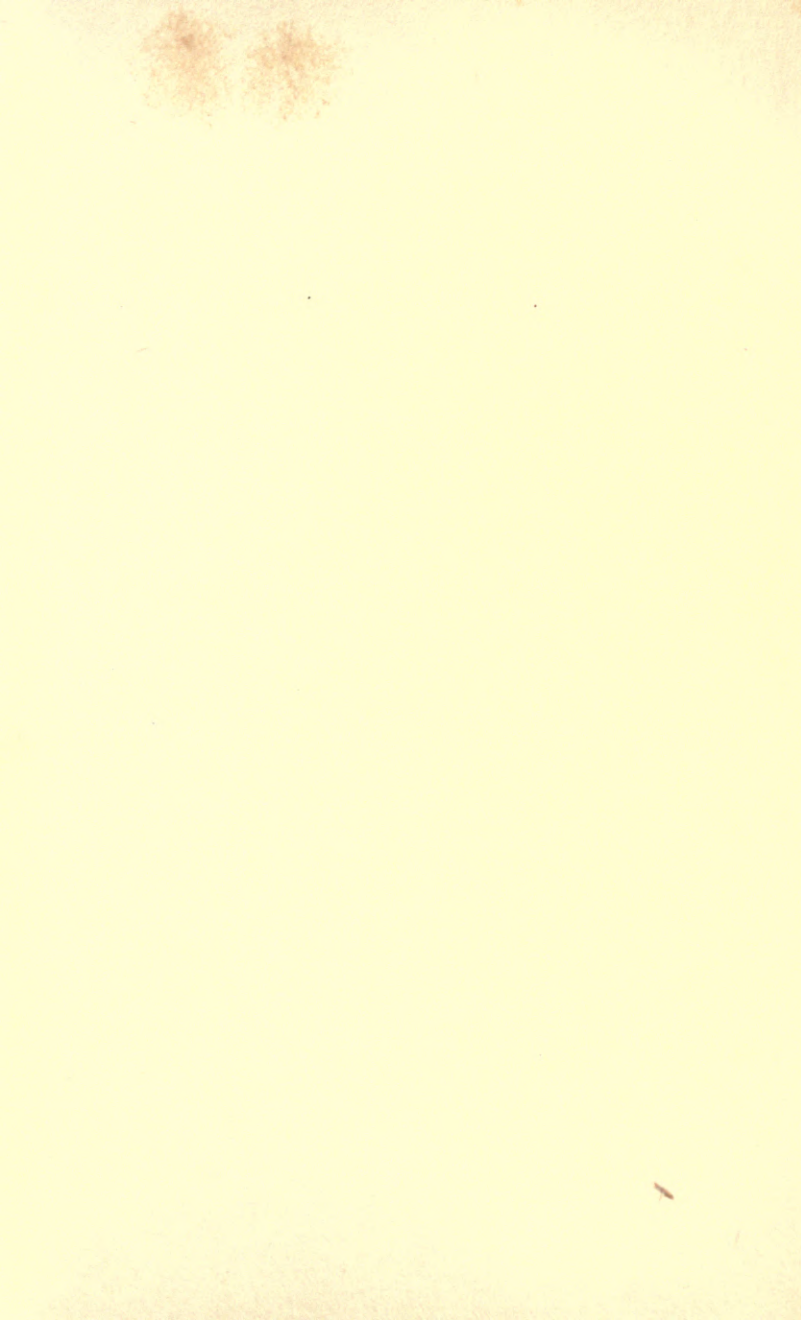
"Shall you live in Mummy's house or will she live in yours?"

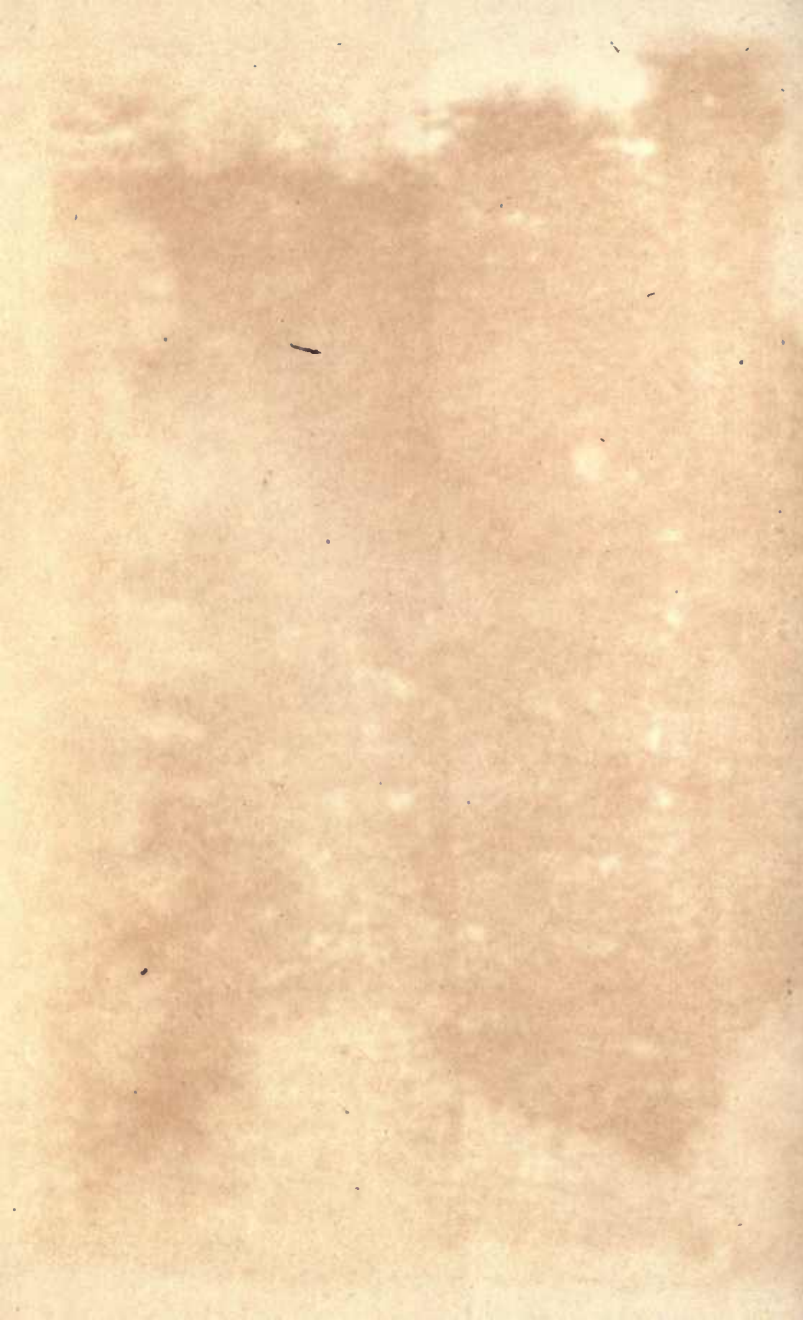
"Which do you advise?"

"Now he's laughing at me, Mummy. I expect he'll laugh at both of us. But you needn't mind. I believe you'll like him."

"I believe I shall," said Daphne.

THE END





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